

Review of Women's Employment in Greece in the 20th and Early 21st Centuries

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In the early 20th century, the role of Greek women in the working environment was considered complementary, and the type of work they would do should fit their Review of Women's Employment in Greece in the 20th and Early 21st Centuries gender stereotypes. Therefore, they were low-paid workers and employees, and they were the first to be laid off. Despite the fact that the number of Greek women participating in the labor market has increased, many of them were obliged to work due to the high rate of men's unemployment since there was no other way to sustain the living level of the household (Alpha Bank, 2018). Greek women's participation in the labor market was accompanied by an increase in flexible types of employment along with the pay gap between men and women, which remained persistent due to the existence of discrimination.

Keywords: unemployment, pay gap, flexible employment, discrimination, labor, employment, Greek women

Introduction

This paper is part of my doctoral dissertation, "Greek Women's Handicraft, Labor Law, and the Creation of Employment in Tourism", which focuses on women's entrepreneurship in handicraft and, more specifically, in the jewelry sector.

The role of the Greek woman in the labor market has changed a lot in modern history. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, women in Greece were confined to the private space of the family, and their education focused on serving their roles as mothers and wives.

Although there has been a development since the 1970s, women's labor was considered complimentary and mostly temporary.

There has been progress in terms of sex equality in the labor market among men and women; however, the salary gap is still high, as are unemployment rates. The economic crisis has exacerbated the Greek women's unemployment rate. The Greek labor market has structural weaknesses, mainly a low level of female employment, and especially during the economic crisis, unemployment was the result of insufficient demand (Mouriki, 2012; Macia, 2010).

This work deterioration implies a deterioration in both income and prospects. Lower wages due to part-time employment in a country where wages were already low compared to other EU countries (Reinis Fischer, 2020) combined with high unemployment rates have pushed wages down even further and are a sure way to create poverty.

However, even before the financial crisis, as mentioned, Greek women had to deal with inequality in the working environment, while the participation of men in housework and childcare was the lowest in Europe (Michopoulos, 2015).

Stereotypes regarding domestic tasks hinder equal access to the labor market, especially during the economic crisis when social welfare was dramatically reduced. The inadequacy of state social support forced women to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers. This fact is another additional reason why women work as part-time and temporary workers, while for both of these forms of employment, the trend is increasing.

It may, therefore, be assumed that the reduction of full-time female employment and the increase of flexible employment show that the role of Greek women in the labor force is considered complementary.

Greek Women's Employment in the Early 20th Century

In the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century, there was much debate in Greece about the expansion of women's professional activities and their access to academic and traditionally "male" jobs. Women's professional employment was accepted for social and humanitarian reasons, emphasizing the fact that women's work should be careful and not exceed their social mission and the limits of their gender (Avdela, & Psara, 1988).

Despite the fact that Greek women slowly began to be accepted in the working environment, their role was still considered "complementary". The perception of the complementary role of women is also shown by the lack of discussion about the equal political rights of men and women.

The development of small industries, the public sector, and the creation of a working class in urban centers encouraged women to seek participation in the labor market. In 1907, the participation of women in the labor market reached 16%, while in 1920 it reached 20%.

Attempts to integrate women into political and/or labor institutions are sometimes mockingly rejected, while in the period 1919-1936, the New State forced the return of women to the home (Varika, & Sklaveniti, 1981).

Following the Asia Minor disaster in 1922, women participated en masse in the labor market. In 1928, almost 23.2% of the workers were women, while 36.2% of them were refugees, while male refugees were 23.8%. The carpet and textile industries employed skilled women workers (Leontiadou, 1992).

The characteristics of female workers in the 1920s were as follows: 10-19 years old, 50% had little or no education, quite often they were supporting financially one or more family members, and the majority were working in the factory by the time they got married. Their daily wages corresponded to half or a third of men's.

Female workers started working at a younger age than males. The working hours of the women exceeded the normal working hours, and the sanitary conditions were not good (Moschou-Sakurrafou, 1990).

In the tobacco industry, women and children were used to pack tobacco and cigarettes and sometimes as assistants in the cigarette-making machines. Women workers were paid daily or based on their individual production. They worked in the factory until they got married. They continued to work at home while also being responsible for raising the children.

Tapestry was a new industry for Greece. It was developed because mainly women were working in it. 50,000 Greek women carpet workers came from Asia Minor. An additional reason for the growth of tapestry was that women workers could work from home. By 1926, 80 small carpet mills had been established, while in 1927, the number of workers in the industry (including domestic women workers) reached 11,000. Unfortunately, however, the development ended in a dead end because the main market for Greek carpets was the USA; however, this market shrank due to the crisis of 1929.

Women accounted for 83% of carpet workers, 72% of workers in the tobacco industry, and 71% of the clothing industry in Athens (Argolic Library, 2012).

The majority of female workers were not members of a trade union, apart from the women workers in the tobacco industry.

In the 1920 and 1928 censuses, while the majority of people declared themselves unemployed, they were in fact employed. The “no occupation” category included women who worked on family farms (Xiradaki, 1988).

Liberals did not agree with women’s vocational education, and the prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos said in 1929 that the most important job for a woman is to become a mother and that the education provided to middle-class women focused on them becoming good housewives (Mavrogordatos, & Hatziosif, 1992).

Apart from the women who worked in family farms and the wage earners, there were two other categories of women workers. One category included women of the lower classes who worked at home or had a small neighborhood business, e.g., dressmakers, milliners, and embroiderers. In the 1928 census, these women were not included as “individual workers” in the industrial sector. The other category included teachers, maids, midwives, writers, artists, and a few doctors. This category was called “freelancers”, but only 20% of them worked as such (Moschou-Sakurrafou, 1990).

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The participation of women in the labor market was negatively treated by the male population, regardless of social class. Men believed that it was inappropriate for women to work (Xiradaki, 1988). This male reaction led to a 1930 law that prohibited women from engaging in trade without the consent of their husbands.

Discrimination in the work environment was significant. Women were the first to be laid off when wage cuts or reorganization of operations were planned. There were public bodies that prohibited the employment of women. These bodies were: the diplomatic corps, the archaeological service, the State General Chemistry, the Council of State, and the judicial sector in general. The internal regulations of the National Bank of Greece, in 1931, stated that only single women could be hired who would be automatically fired once they got married (Moschou-Sakurrafou, 1990). Some other organizations and companies had a limited number of women, and their promotion was blocked in favor of their male colleagues, despite the fact that the men were less qualified (Xiradaki, 1988).

In 1935, the public sector was reorganized, and there were regulations prohibiting women with children from working after fifteen years of work experience. At the same time, it was forbidden to employ women in the public sector, except for daughters and women who had lost their husbands in the war. In exceptional cases, women were employed as teachers, secretaries, telephone operators, nurses, and cleaners (Moschou-Sakurrafou, 1990). In 1935, the Collective Bargaining Act set wage restrictions according to the gender of workers and therefore segregated work according to gender and devalued women’s work (Moschou-Sakurrafou, 1990).

The 1940 census had problems since the process of collecting data for the active working population was never completed due to the war and the German invasion of Greece. In the following census in 1951, there was a great underestimation of women as “helping and unpaid family members” (Symeonidou, 1986).

Greek Women's Employment in 1960-1990

In 1961, 65.5% (782,000 women) of the working women were employed in the primary sector, whereas in the secondary sector, 155,000 were employed and in services, 191,500 (Konsta, 1981). Working women in the industrial sector increased from one in four in 1958 to one in two in 1969, and the main reason was male immigration, which was bigger than the women's (Nikolaidou, 1978).

In the secondary sector, women's participation was the lowest, while women workers were dominant in the tobacco industry (75.5%) and in the textile industry (70%) (Nikolaidou, 1978). It should be noticed that 16% of the working women were girls 10-14 years old. The majority (52% of women employed) were 20-24 years old. The main reason is that women used to stop working after marriage, especially after having children. Only 1/5 of the working women were married (Nikolaidou, 1978).

Women's work was still considered complementary, and this is the reason for the lack of specialization and the low women's salaries (Avdi-Kalkani, 1989). In 1961, unemployed men were 4.9% of the total male working force, whereas unemployed women were 8% of the total female working force (Symeonidou, 1986).

The inequality of wages between men and women was legally approved. In 1958, women's wages in industry were 37-46 drachmas, compared to 60-70 for men. In 1965, it was 56-65, versus 90-110 (Nikolaidou, 1978).

Many women were employed as servants, and others were working from home, paid by the number of products produced. Usually, they were not recorded as employed, and they did not have social and medical insurance (Papadopoulou, 1975). 96.5% of the typists and stenographers were women. 91.5% of the lower-level nursing staff and 66% of the employees in packaging (Zevgou, 1966).

In 1971, 478,000 (52.8%) women were employed in the primary sector, 150,000 in the secondary sector, and 220,000 in services. 9.7% of women employed were girls 10-14 years old (Konsta, 1981). 37% of the working women were 20-24 years old. The drop in the percentage of working women aged 20-24 is linked to the changes that had appeared in Greek society, a large part of which ceased to consider women's work incompatible with marriage and child care (Nikolaidou, 1978).

In the 1980s, Greek working women workers gained the right to equal treatment with men in terms of working conditions, careers, wages, career guidance, education, and social security. At the same time, they acquired the right to maternity leave.

European Union law and the Greek Constitution prohibit direct and indirect discrimination. However, discrimination was still existing. For example, in the public sector, women were at the lower levels of the hierarchy even though their education was higher than men's (Symeonidou, 1986). In 1980, 96.3% of the women working in the public sector were, at minimum, secondary school graduates, whereas the corresponding percentage for men was 75.5% (Symeonidou, 1986). A number of organizations, mainly banks (the National Bank of Greece, the Agricultural Bank of Greece, etc.), excluded women from recruitment competitions.

According to Avdi-Kalkani (1989), indirect discrimination will continue to exist from the moment professional life is not harmonized with personal life.

Despite the fact that, in Greece, there are many laws for the equality of men and women, their application is uncertain since the working woman, who is also a mother, is considered an unproductive worker who must adapt and work as a man (Avdi-Kalkani, 1989). According to Doukeri (1986), despite the fact that women participated in the labor market, the traditional model of the perfect mother, wife, and housewife was not changed.

In the 1990s, the European NOW initiative further promoted equality at work and introduced the institution of equality advisors (Stratigaki, 2002). However, Kravaritou (1991) argues that protective measures for women actually hinder their career development, and employers treat them unequally. Furthermore, EU laws have ignored women's unpaid work at home for the family and equalized the legal status of men and women. These laws express the "male" perception of equality, which ignores the social role of women and the family.

In the 1990s, women's participation in the labor market increased from 1.1% in 1993 to 9.6% in 1997 (Ioakeimoglou, & Kritikides, 1998).

Greek Women's Employment in the Early 21st Century

During the financial crisis that started in 2009, many unfriendly measures for women were introduced. The favorable arrangements for the early retirement of mothers with children who worked in the public sector were abolished, and the retirement age was increased from 50 years (2010) to 62 years (2012) (Law 4093/12), while there were no compensatory measures to support motherhood.

In November 2011, the list of heavy and unhealthy occupations was narrowed, in particular, to occupations practiced mainly by women, such as hairdressers, cleaners, and cashiers in supermarkets. In 2010, there were significant reductions in pensions, while 30% of women over 65 were at risk of poverty; the corresponding figure for men was 23% (Petmesidou, 2012).

The unemployment rate in Greece was quite high for both men and women.

In 2018, 14.7% of men and 23.7% of women were unemployed (ELSTAT, 2022). The number of self-employed without personnel rose to 22%, while the number of family helpers decreased. Part-time employees amounted to 9.2%, while temporary workers amounted to 7.1% (ELSTAT, 2022). However, it should be pointed out that the informal economy flourishes in Greece, and many women do not appear in the statistical data because they are paid in cash or do piece work (Davaki, 2013).

Over time, the unemployment rate for women in Greece is higher than for men.

Employment in Greece increased by 1.3% compared to 2022, however, with a small growth rate, while the unemployment rate reached 11.3% (Eurobank Research, 2024).

For the period January-September 2023, although the unemployment rate for women decreased from 16.7% to 14.8% (a decrease of 1.9%), the unemployment rate for men decreased from 9.5% to 8.4% (a decrease of 1.1%), the unemployment rate for women remains high. Correspondingly, in the Eurozone, the unemployment rate for women decreased from 7.9% to 6.9%, while the corresponding rate for 2023 for men was 6.2% (Eurobank Research, 2024).

In 2017, the pay gap in Greece amounted to 15%, while in the European Union it was 16.3%, which is a significant improvement. However, according to INE GSEE (2017), the net average salary of women for the period 2010-2017 decreased significantly.

The pay gap is the difference in average gross hourly pay among men and women across the economy (European Commission, 2014). It should be noted that in the period 2010-2017, the average net pay of men also decreased (INE GSEE, 2017). In the same period, the pay gap in full-time employment was 9%. The narrowing of the part-time pay gap shows the impact of the economic crisis on employment. The wages of part-time and flexible employment employees, and especially those of men, decreased by more than a quarter in 2010 (INE GSEE, 2017).

In the private sector, the wage gap is greater in terms of total salaried labor (4.3 units) and full-time

employment (3.7 units) compared to the total number of women employed. In the broader public sector, the pay gap is smaller in terms of total wage employment (4.2 units) and full-time employment (2.1 units) (INE GSEE, 2017).

According to the European Commission (2014), the reasons for the pay gap are as follows:

- Men hold the top management positions and are preferred for promotions.
- Women undertake unpaid tasks, e.g., child rearing and housework, more than men. This is why one in three women works part-time, compared to one in ten men.
- In some professions, there is an underrepresentation of women, while in others, there is an overrepresentation, e.g., teachers or saleswomen, professions with lower salaries compared to the professions practiced by men. When women work in the same occupations as men, occupations that require the same level of education and experience, they are paid less.

The pay gap between men and women in Greece is due to the existence of discrimination.

For the time period 2010-2018, pay did not disappear despite the equal percentage increase in salaried labor for men and women (33.2% and 32.8%, respectively). The position of women became worse because women did not exceed 47% of all employees. Until 2013, the monthly number of women employees did not differ from the monthly number of registered unemployed women. After 2014, women employees were more than men and registered unemployed women.

In the 25-34 age group, there are 15% more female university graduates compared to male graduates, and their percentage is close to the average of OECD countries (42% versus 44% of OECD countries) (ADIP, 2018). In 2018, university graduates aged 30-34 were 37.5% men and 51.03% women, with an average of 44.3%, which exceeded the national target for 2020 of 32%. Women university graduates aged 25-64 amounted to 32%, while in OECD countries the corresponding percentage was 37% (ADIP, 2018).

At this point, it should be pointed out that women prefer less lucrative studies such as the social sciences and humanities, while men prefer medicine and STEM (Livanos, & Pouliakas, 2012).

Despite the high percentage of female graduates, academia in Greece is male-dominated. Male university professors amount to 65.71%, a percentage much higher than the European average of 57.22% (Lakasas, 2019).

The Greek economic crisis affected women more than men. In particular, pregnant women and mothers were negatively affected because they were forced to become unemployed or work part-time (Davaki, 2013).

It seems that there are stereotypes regarding the role of women in the labor market, which were intensified by the austerity measures imposed due to the economic crisis (Davaki, 2013). Stereotypes are particularly strong in the police, the army, etc., which are mainly male-dominated areas, but also in the health, education, and public administration sectors (Davaki, 2013). Many young women were asked at job interviews whether they would start a family (Davaki, 2013). Discrimination in pay and fringe benefits (such as maternity leave and impending maternity leave) prevailed despite existing anti-discrimination laws (Ombudsman, 2012).

Due to the crisis and the general lack of social services, Greek women took care of the elderly. Austerity measures limited the provision of care to the elderly, and therefore, the family and especially women took care of the elderly along with caring for children (Davaki, 2013).

According to the European Commission (2011), in 2010, 68.6% of Greek women had caring duties, compared to 28.3% of the EU-27. Therefore, the past stereotype of a woman being a good housewife remained. According to Petmesidou (2012), women who cared for their relatives asked for financial help or flexible work to be able to combine it with caring duties.

The imbalance of work and family responsibilities also affects other areas in which Greek women could participate. Based on the results of KETHI research (2006), the main factor that prevents women from engaging in politics is work-family balance, while a way to promote women's participation in high positions is to facilitate the balance between work and family life and the positive presentation of women in the media.

The austerity measures also affected women's reproductive health because, according to Joint Ministerial Decision 93443/11/18-8-2011, women had to pay 600 euros for a normal birth and 1200 euros for a caesarean, while they had to pay for all postpartum tests. In the event that they cannot pay, they will pay the cost of the birth through their personal taxation. Children will not be able to get a birth certificate unless the above costs have been paid (Davaki, 2013). As a result of these measures, the low birth rate increased, and Greece was the first to have abortions in the EU (Davaki, 2013).

Conclusions

According to INE GSEE (2018), the unemployment rate for women for the period 1993-2017 was higher than that of men. The low degree of participation in the labor market and the high degree of unemployment were the main reasons for the low degree of employment of Greek women. Women's work is considered complementary, despite women's higher educational level. The bulk of employed women are in low-paid jobs such as saleswomen, clerks, unskilled industrial and service workers, customer service workers, teachers, accountants' assistants, and research assistants.

According to Avdela (2011, p. 15), "the current economic crisis is a setback in terms of the way gender is perceived and used politically. This is largely due to the fact that crises tend to make gender invisible".

From the beginning of the economic crisis until 2018, the low level of participation of Greek women in the labor market mainly concerned women who worked in both small and large companies, the self-employed, agricultural workers, and in general those who worked full-time. Over the years, higher levels of employment for women have been noted in services, salaried jobs, and flexible forms of employment (part-time and temporary) (INE GSEE, 2018).

Apart from the economic crisis, an additional problem mentioned by researchers (Eurobank Research, 2024) is the reduction of the population, despite the migration flows, which makes imperative the participation of both women and young people in the labor market. Their participation is considered important in order to offset the effects that population decline will have on the Greek GDP.

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