



Industrial relations and social dialogue
**Greece: Developments in
working life 2023**

Author: Penny Georgiadou (Labour Institute of Greek General Confederation of Labour, INE-GSEE)

Research manager: Maria Sedlakova

Eurofound reference number: WPEF24047

© European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), 2024
Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the Eurofound copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

Any queries on copyright must be addressed in writing to: copyright@eurofound.europa.eu

Research carried out prior to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on 31 January 2020, and published subsequently, may include data relating to the 28 EU Member States. Following this date, research only takes into account the 27 EU Member States (EU28 minus the UK), unless specified otherwise.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00

Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu

Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

Contents

Introduction	1
Political context	3
Actors and institutions	4
Social partners.....	4
Social dialogue bodies or frameworks	4
Other working life related institutions.....	4
Developments in collective bargaining	5
Changes to the collective bargaining structures and frameworks.....	5
Data on collective bargaining.....	6
Collectively agreed pay outcomes and wage-setting mechanism	7
Collective bargaining and inflation.....	7
Developments in governmental responses to inflation.....	9
Labour disputes and industrial action	11
Changes to the right to strike.....	11
Data on industrial action	12
Collective labour disputes in 2023	13
Developments in working time.....	15
Changes to legislation	15
Bargaining outcomes	16
Debates on duration and organisation	16
Other important policy developments	18
Regulations on employment status and contracts	18
Policies to reduce the gender pay-gap.....	18
Health and safety regulations and policies	19
Work-life balance related policies.....	19
Life-long learning and skills development.....	19
Other topics	20
Commentary and outlook	22
References.....	24

Introduction

Greece's main economic and social developments in 2023 are related to high inflation and the increased energy prices.

After a GDP decrease of 9.3% that was recorded in 2020 due to the pandemic, the country's GDP grew by 8.4% in 2021 and 5.6% in 2022. According to the estimate of the Bank of Greece (2023) in its interim report, growth is projected to approach 2.4% in 2023.

Also, the Inflation rate continued its upward trend in 2023, and the Average Consumer Price Index (CPI) in 2023 showed an increase of 3.5% compared to 2022, while in 2022 the increase was 9.6% compared to 2021, and in 2021, the increase was 1.2% as compared to 2020 (ELSTAT, 2024b).

The CPI of December 2023 increased by 3.5% as compared to the corresponding CPI of December 2022, whereas the CPI of December 2022 increased by 7.2% as compared to the corresponding CPI of December 2021, whereas the respective increase recorded between 2021 and 2020 was 5.1% (ELSTAT, 2024b).

The unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2023 reached 11.2% and showed a decrease compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year (2nd quarter of 2022) when it was 12.4% and the 2nd quarter of 2021 when it was 15.8% (ELSTAT, 2023a).

In the same reporting period, (second quarter of 2023) the employed people amounted to 4.24 million, marking an increase of 69,300 people compared to the previous year 2022 and the largest percentage of employed persons worked as dependent employees (69.9%), while the share of self-employed without staff was also considerable (19.9%).

The percentage of part-time employment is 7.4%, and the percentage of employees with temporary work is 7.8%. Part-time employment has decreased by 11.1% compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year (2022).

The largest percentage of the employed (49.9%) worked 40 - 47 hours per week, and a significant percentage (19.3%) stated that they worked 48 or more hours (ELSTAT, 2023a).

In November 2023, the unemployment rate in the country reached 9.4% compared to 11.9% in November 2022. The unemployment rate was 11.7% among women (15.3% in November 2022) and 7.5% among men (9.2% in November 2022). In the 15-24 age group, the unemployment rate continued to be very high, i.e., 27.3% (31.1% in November 2022), and in the 25-74 age group, it was 8.4% (from 10.8%) (ELSTAT, 2024c).

In April 2023, the minimum wage was increased to 780€ from €713 on 31 March 2023.

In the year 2023 as compared to 2022 the 18.9% of the Country's total population was at risk of poverty after social transfers, recording a decrease of 0.1%.¹ Before the granting of social benefits, the percentage at risk of poverty amounted to 23,61%² (ELSTAT,2024a).

¹The poverty threshold amounts to €5,712 per year per one-person household and €11,995 for families with two adults and two dependent children under the age of 14. Moreover, it is set at 60% of the median total equivalent disposable income of households, which was estimated at €9,520, while the average annual disposable income of households in the country was estimated at €17,089.

² Social benefits include the guaranteed minimum income, the winter fuel allowance, housing subsidies, family and social solidarity benefits.

Political context

In Greece, 2023 was a year of national parliamentary elections. On 21 May 2023, a few weeks before the official end of the mandate of the New Democracy government, the elections were held using the absolute proportional representation system, which was applied for the first time since 1990.

In these elections of the 300 members of the Greek Parliament, New Democracy (ND) was the first party with 40.79% and 146 seats, followed by the Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA-P.S.) with 20.07% and 71 seats, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement – Movement of Change (PASOK-KINAL) with 11.46 % and 41 seats, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) with 7.23% and 26 seats, and “Elliniki Lysi” with 4.45% and 16 seats. The 21 May elections did not lead to the formation of a government with a working majority or a coalition government.

For this reason, the parliamentary elections were repeated on 25 June 2023 with the reinforced proportional representation system based on a relevant law of 2020. In these elections, New Democracy received 40.55% and 158 seats; SYRIZA received 17.84% and 48 seats; PASOK – KINAL received 11.85% and 32 seats; the KKE received 7.69% (20 seats); the “Spartiates” party won 12 seats, the “Elliniki Lysi” won 12 seats; the “Niki” party won 10 seats, and the “Plefsi Eleftherias” party won 8 seats. The new parliament is composed of six parties. It is noted that these parliamentary elections had the highest abstention rate since 1974, which amounted to 46.26% of the electorate.

Based on the above results, a government with a working majority was formed by the New Democracy party for a four-year term, with Syriza as the major opposition party. The low percentage of the major opposition led to the resignation of the president of SYRIZA, triggered an internal party crisis, and caused the subsequent split of its parliamentary group.

Also, on October 8 and 15 (run-off elections), local government elections were held to elect municipal and regional authorities. The term of office of the elected members of the councils shall be five years and run from 1 January 2024 until 31 December 2028.

Actors and institutions

Social partners

In 2023, the number and the organizational structure of the national social partners continued to be the same as in previous years.

The private sector workers are represented by the GSEE (Greek General Confederation of Labour).

The five recognized national employers' organisations are:

- ΣΕΒ – SEV (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises)
- ΓΣΕΒΕΕ – GSEVEE (Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants)
- ΕΣΕΕ – ESEE (Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship)
- ΣΕΤΕ – SETE (Greek Tourism Confederation)
- ΣΒΕ – SBE (Federation of Industries of Greece)

In the public sector the employees are represented by ADEDY (Supreme Administration of Unions of Public Servants).

Social dialogue bodies or frameworks

During 2023 there were no changes on the institutional framework of the social dialogue.

Other working life related institutions

In 2023, there were no changes in the institutional framework and practices governing other institutional bodies related to working life, but the previous legislation of 2021 and 2022 regarding the Labour Inspectorate (SEPE) and the Public Employment Agency (DYPA, former OAED) continued to have some consequences in their status and operation during 2023.

Developments in collective bargaining

Changes to the collective bargaining structures and frameworks

During 2023 there were no changes in the structure and the legal framework of the collective bargaining system. However, during the whole period 2018-2022, significant changes were taken place that shaped the current situation in collective bargaining system.

In 2018 (20 August), the financial support programme was formally brought to an end by the institutions (EU, ECB, ESM) and Greece regained some fiscal autonomy. The government introduced important labour reform that have significantly changed the collective bargaining system. After the suspension period (2012-2018), a decree of Minister of Labour (No. 32921/2175/13-6-2018), introduced the re-establishment of the extension mechanism of the sectoral collective agreements.

The new legislation introduced the terms and the processes of extension of the sectoral collective agreements. If the member companies of a sectoral employers' association, who signs the agreement employ at least 51% of employees of the certain sector, then the agreement becomes obligatory for the whole sector by a ministerial decision. For this reason, the employers' organisations must submit their members' register voluntarily. If the employers' organisations do not submit it, the obligatory extension of the collective agreement is not possible.

In October 2019 another revision of the extension mechanism was made by the government of ND (New Democracy). According to the newest legislation in force (Law 4635/30-10-2019), the extension of a collective agreement or arbitration decision requires the following: a) Any of the signatory parties must submit an official application to the Minister of Labour (with notification to the Supreme Labour Council - ASE) accompanied by documentation on the impact of the extension on competitiveness and employment, b) a reasoned opinion from ASE to the Minister of Labour taking the above into account, together with a substantiated attestation from the competent department of the Ministry of Labour that the collective arrangement is binding on employers of more than 50% of the workers in the sector, c) issuing of the extension decision by the Minister of Labour.

By the same law, the national minimum wage is set by the government and only this is obligatory for all employers. The sectoral/occupational agreements become obligatory only if they cover at least 51% of the employees and according to the special process of the extension mechanism provided by the law. The company-based agreements apply for all the employees of the company and prevail if the sector has not an obligatory collective agreement.

The law 4635/2019 provides also the possibility for social partners to establish, within the framework of professional and sectoral collective agreements, special terms or exceptions for certain businesses, such as social economy enterprises, non-profit legal entities and enterprises facing serious financial difficulties (those in a state of bankruptcy or negotiating an out-of-court settlement or financial restructuring). The criteria, as well as the categories of terms from which businesses may be exempted, are specified by the Minister of Labor following a recommendation from the Supreme Labor Council. It is noted that, as of June 2024, this provision of the Minister of Labor has not been activated.

Later, the Law 4808/2021 introduced the establishment of the Register of Trade Unions of Employees and Employers' Organizations (GE.MI.S.O.E. and GE.MI.O.E. respectively) in the ERGANI

electronic system³. A necessary precondition for the conclusion of a collective labour agreement is the registration of each trade union and employer organization in the respective electronic Register of the Ministry of Labour, which contains basic information of the organizations including the number of their members.

However, while it is mandatory for the trade unions to enrol in the registry of the Ministry of Labor if they wish to extend the validity of a collective labour agreement, the same does not apply to the employers. This fact creates difficulties in the expansibility of contracts.

Data on collective bargaining

There are no national data on wage bargaining coverage and there is no monitoring authority or mechanism. The rate of collective wage bargaining coverage is assumed to be very low.

According to the annual reports of INE/GSEE (2023a^α) (the scientific institute of GSEE), and the processed data which includes, the number of sectoral or occupational collective agreements as well as estimates for the number of employees covered by them over the last five years are as follows (Table 1):

Table 1: Evolution of collective agreements 2018-2023

Year	Number of Sectoral and Occupational collective agreements signed during the current year	Number of Sectoral and Occupational collective agreements signed in previous years and currently are in force	Total number of Sectoral and Occupational collective agreements which are in force in 2023	Number of employees covered by the collective agreements. (Maximum potential number)*	Coverage percentage of the total number of employees
2018	29	0	29	191.000	10%
2019	19	No answer	19	No answer	No answer
2020	17	20	37	635.000	30%
2021	25	8	33	625.000	27%
2022	24	14	38	735.000	29%
2023	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer	No answer

³ The Integrated Information System "ERGANI" was launched in March 2013 and serves as a tool (platform) of the Ministry of Labor & Social Security for recording and collecting labour market statistical data. Its goal was to reduce bureaucracy and it is considered one of the most significant organizational and digital innovations of the Greek state in the field of labour market and business supervision within the Greek economy. All essential actions regarding the relationships between employees and businesses (hiring, departures, employment contracts, etc.) are recorded in this system. Since its inception, the information system has been upgraded and expanded in terms of its capabilities, functions, and tasks. One of its new features is the inclusion of the prescribed electronic registries of employer and employee organizations (GEMISOE and GEMIOE) as mandated by Law 4808/2021. The electronic registration platform, is accessible at the address: <https://mitroaorganoseon.yeka.gov.gr/>

*Note: *It is noted that this number reflects the maximum potential number of employees who could be covered by the signed collective agreements since not all of them have been declared mandatory, and there is no official record of the number of employees covered by the sectoral or occupational agreements.*

Source: INE/GSEE (2023a)

Collectively agreed pay outcomes and wage-setting mechanism

In Greece, there are no permanent mechanisms and processes for collectively agreed wages at the sectoral or occupational level. A mechanism for determining wages exists and has been operational on a permanent basis since 2018 only for the minimum wage.

With Law No. 4172/2013, article 103, a new mechanism was established for setting the national minimum wage. This provided that, the minimum wage would be set by a final decision of the Ministry of Labour, after consultation with the national social partners and other institutions. The consultation period starts at the beginning of each year and the final ministerial decision is issued at the end of June. This mechanism was applied for the first time in Greece in 2018.

Also, it has to be noted that the national social partners sign the National General Collective Labour Agreement, which from 2012 onwards does not include wage issues (i.e. setting the minimum wage).

Collective bargaining and inflation

In Greece, the Law in force (Law 4172/2013, Article 103(3)) provides that: “The level of the statutory MW and regulated daily wage should be determined by taking into account the situation of the Greek economy and its prospects for growth in terms of productivity, prices, and competitiveness, employment, unemployment rates, incomes, and wages.” Apart from that, there are no further specialised criteria, i.e., there is no link to inflation (index-linked adjustment), no statutory indicators, nor there is any formula used for setting the minimum wage (MW).

The MW is determined through specific consultation, during which the social partners have only the right to be consulted but the final decision is taken by the government.

According to the Law 4172/2013 (Article 103(3)) the determination of the MW should consider the state of the Greek economy and its potential for growth in terms of productivity, prices, competitiveness, employment, unemployment rates, incomes, and wages. However, the legislation lacks detailed specifications regarding the criteria, or the method used for determining the minimum wage.

In this legislative context, the government taking into consideration, among all the above criteria also the inflation rate, it was decided to increase the minimum wage to €780 as of April 1, 2023.

Regarding the rationale for the decision, in line with the conclusion of the consultation on the formation of the minimum wage drawn up (in February 2023) by The Centre of Planning and Economic Research (KEPE) in cooperation with the Committee of Experts, it is stated that:

- Unemployment, which fell from 17.5% in 2019 to 10.8% in January 2023.
- High inflation, expected to reach around 4.5% in 2023.

- The significantly reduced purchasing power of consumers, with a more pronounced impact on the poorer and economically vulnerable, while the minimum wage lags behind by approximately 3 percentage points compared to price increases over the last two years.
- Forecasts for the growth rate of the Greek economy in 2023 range from 1.2% to 2.2%.
- The fact that wage increases create positive expectations.
- The previous increase in the minimum wage, despite contributing to the increase in the unit labor cost, had no consequences for the country's competitiveness.
- The increase in the minimum wage will also raise average wages.

An important consideration was also taken into account, namely, that all social partners agree to increase the minimum wage, a proposal endorsed by research organizations as well.

As regards the sectoral and occupational collective agreements signed in 2022- 2023, none of them directly connects the wage increases with the inflation rate.

Developments in governmental responses to inflation

The government has taken several measures to address the impact of high inflation and the energy crisis on households and enterprises.

Some of these measures started in the beginning of 2023 and continued throughout the year. For example:

- A state subsidy in the electricity bills for households was introduced on 9 February 2022 and continued to be in force for the whole 2023. However, the government introduced some changes on the criteria of the subsidy in January 2023, which reduced the number of beneficiaries as well as the subsidy amounts⁴
- A so-called “household basket” was introduced on 2 November 2022 which continued to be in force throughout the year 2023. The measure aimed to tackle the rising inflation and high food prices by offering some special products to the consumers, one per category, essential for a decent living, at lower prices. This list of products, included in the household basket was updated during 2023.
- On 22 February 2023, a new measure, the so-called “market pass”, granted a financial assistance to households from the state budget. The aid was intended to cover a part of the increased cost of purchases, especially foodstuff, resulted by the significant increase in the consumer price index⁵.

Other measures taken by the government to face high inflation and the energy crisis are the following:

- An increase in the amount of the “guaranteed minimum income” by 8% was given from 1/12/2023, per Joint Ministerial Decision No 97046/6-11-2023, by broadening the income criterion for inclusion and the income ceilings. The guaranteed/maximum monthly income support for a single-person household is €216 (from €200), increased according to the number of family members. The monthly guaranteed amount may not exceed €972 (from €900) (ceiling).
- An exceptional (one-off) financial support (as an “Easter bonus” for 2023) was given to the low income pensioners on 30 March 2023 and amounted €200 - €300 per person⁶ according to their pension status.
- An exceptional (one-off) financial support was given to the vulnerable groups of the population which included: (a) Aid of €150 per person to low income pensioners, to uninsured elderly people and to persons with disabilities, (b) Aid of €200 per person to

⁴ Eurofound (2021), [Electricity subsidy for consumers](#), case GR-2021-36/2379 (measures in Greece), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

⁵ Eurofound (2022), Market Pass: food subsidy, case GR-2023-8/3100 (measures in Greece), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

⁶ <https://www.ieidiseis.gr/oikonomia/191455/ektakto-voithima-pasxa-2023-se-syntaksioyxous-ksekinise-i-pliromi-gia-to-epidoma-os-300-evro>

persons with disabilities, (c) A half monthly extra payment for the beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum income, (d) An additional one and a half monthly payment of the child benefit in April to the beneficiaries.

Other initiatives of the government in addressing the high cost of living and protecting consumers were the organisation of anti-profiteering inspections in multinational companies during October 2023. The inspections revealed an infringement of Article 54 of the Law 5045/29-07-2023 on the reduction of unfair profitability, and fines were imposed on certain companies.

More specifically, in July 2023, the government introduced provisions to curb unfair profit-making through Law 5045, Articles 54 and 55. Article 14 introduced the maximum possible gross profit from the sale of a series of products and services related to essential goods (health, education, food, heating, transportation), school supplies, and raw materials for agricultural production. For these businesses, the maximum gross profit could not exceed the corresponding profit per unit of product as of December 31, 2021. In November 2023, after inspections by the competent authorities on multinational and other companies regarding the implementation of the law, cases of unfair profit-making were identified, and fines totaling at least €4.5 million were imposed on seven companies.

Also, with the Law 5055/29.9.2023, the Government introduced provisions on the “proper functioning of the market”; in particular, Articles 15-17 provide for three measures on the reduction of consumer prices: (a) the supermarkets’ obligation to announce product price increases to the Ministry of Development ; (b) the labelling of products with a price reduction commitment under the “Permanent Price Reduction initiative,” which is provided by the supplier companies and (c) the publication of fruit and vegetable prices to the Ministry of Development.

More specifically, the regulations provide that supermarkets having an annual turnover of more than €90 million must notify the Ministry of Development of any price increase from the supplier of consumer products necessary for a decent living or those with high demand. In the event of non-compliance by the companies, the fine will be €50,000 for each case of withholding information.

More specifically, regarding the measure for fruit and vegetable products, supermarkets will have to inform about the indicative retail prices of fruit and vegetables at regular intervals to the Ministry of Development. At the same time, the Ministry of Development announced the indicative prices to consumers through the websites and the “e-katanalotis” [namely, e-consumer] online platform. Offenders will face a fine of €20,000.

Finally, the labelling of products with a price reduction commitment was introduced. In this case, businesses, industries, and wholesalers of consumer products will be able to participate in the “Permanent Price Reduction” initiative if, by 30 November 2023, they send a written commitment to the Ministry of Development to reduce prices by at least 5% – excluding promotions – for the next six months⁷.

⁷ SEV, Special Report Issue 80, September 2023

Labour disputes and industrial action

During 2023, the most significant development involved the legislation of changes regarding the right to strike. The new regulations made the framework for initiating and implementing strikes stricter, causing reactions from the trade unions.

Changes to the right to strike

Following legislative changes made after 2018, the right to strike has been substantially modified.

The law 4808/2021 under the article 86 titled “right to work” amended the previous law 4512/2018 and provides that the decision for calling a strike in a company or a workplace, requires a natural or an electronic vote of the 50% of the 'financially settled union members' (i.e. those who have paid membership fees). However, for brief stoppages of a few hours, which may not be repeated more often than once a week, a decision of the union's executive council is sufficient unless its standing rules stipulate otherwise.

In addition, the law 4808/2021 made the context for the strike implementation stricter providing that a notice of the employer is required at least 24 hours before the realization of even short work stoppages.

Furthermore, public or public utility companies may not hold a strike before four days have elapsed since the notification of their demands, by a document notified by a bailiff to the employer, to the Ministry exercising the relevant supervision of the company concerned, as well as to the Ministry of Labour. In addition, trade unions, before the strike or a short work stoppage takes place, must submit a request for a public dialogue to the Organization of Mediation and Arbitration (O.M.E.D.). During the public debate period, the exercise of the right to strike is suspended and it is forbidden to bring an action before the competent courts on issues related to the strike in question.

The trade unions declaring a strike must have at the disposal of the company the necessary Security Personnel during the strike for the safety of the company premises and the prevention of disasters and accidents.

Especially for public or utility companies, there is another obligation, in addition to that of providing security personnel; that is to provide Minimum Guaranteed Service Personnel in order to address the basic needs of society as a whole during the strike. The personnel must at least be equal to the one third of the service normally provided and therefore a percentage of Minimum Guaranteed Service Personnel must be at the disposal of the company. The Security Personnel and in the cases where a Minimum Guaranteed Service personnel is required, have to be agreed between the most representative trade union of the enterprise and the employer and must be notified to the Ministry of Labor by November 25 of each year.

If the above procedure is not followed, then the strike is declared as illegal.

Finally, in 2023, Article 31 of the new Law 5053/26.9.2023 introduced a new addition to Article 93 of Law 4808/2021 on strike. This new provision imposes criminal liability and specifically states that: *“whoever (a) obstructs in any way the free and unimpeded entry into or departure from the workplace of, or the provision of work by, employees who do not take part in a strike and who wish to work, or (b) physically abuses employees or threatens them by physical abuse or any other*

unlawful act or omission to force them to participate in the strike, or (c) takes part in the occupation of workplaces or their entry, during or independently of a strike, shall be punishable by imprisonment of at least six (6) months and a fine if the act is not punished more severely by another provision. The repeated commission of the offence constitutes an aggravating circumstance.”

The law was passed without prior consultation with social partners. The bill was put to public consultation through the electronic platform open gov.gr. From the side of the social partners, strong objections were expressed by the GSEE and ADEDY in a memorandum, arguing that the restrictions and prohibitions included in the law not only hinder the legitimate exercise of the right to strike but also lead to its actual abolition and violate Article 23, paragraph 2 of the Constitution regarding the right to strike. Employer representative organizations did not take a position on the law.

Data on industrial action

In Greece there are no official and reliable data or other statistics concerning the industrial action between 2018-2023 such as the number of strikes/lock-outs/ the working days lost, the number of participants and other information.

Nevertheless, according to the national annual report of Labour Institute of Greek Confederation of Labour, (INE GSEE) (2022), which is the only organisation that gathers information and keeps records on the industrial actions in Greece, during the period between 2018 -2021, the number of strikes oscillated between 45 to 89, while the number of other actions between 165 and 333 (see table 2).

Table 2. Industrial action developments 2018– 2021

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of strikes (national, sectoral, enterprise level),	89	66	64	45
Number of other actions (work stoppages, rallies, workers' manifestations, withdrawal of labour, picketing, demonstrations)	179	165	333	196

Source: INE GSEE, 2022, The strike action in Greece during 2020-2021, October 2022

In 2022 and 2023, the most important issues on which collective action was taken, and workers and pensioners were mobilised, included the high cost of products, low wages, the adoption of the labour law in September 2023 (Law 5053/2023), the tax bill adopted in December 2023 (Law 5073/2023), and the railway accident that occurred in Tempi on 28/2/2023 and claimed the lives of 57 people.

Collective labour disputes in 2023

The most recently enacted and current law on arbitration (Law 4635/2019) allows for unilateral recourse to arbitration only in two cases: (a) in cases of collective disputes involving sectors or enterprises of a public or common utility nature, and (b) if the collective dispute concerns the conclusion of a collective labor agreement and negotiations between the parties fail definitively, and the resolution of the dispute is necessitated by an existing reason of broader social or public interest connected with the functioning of the Greek economy. These provisions appear to act as a deterrent to resorting to arbitration, resulting in a reduction in arbitration cases. In 2023, not a single collective dispute was resolved through the arbitration.

This legislative framework also affects the collective disputes related to inflation or increased prices in products and energy in Greece, where no labor disputes were recorded despite the fact that increased energy prices and inflation have significantly raised the cost of living, intensified the population's impoverishment, and widened economic and social inequalities.

The response to these developments was expressed in the form of mobilizations /manifestations.

Among the most significant and representative strikes in terms of issues and organizing bodies during 2023 were the following.

The General Confederation of Labour (GSEE), the Supreme Administration of Unions of Public Servants (ADEDY), and other trade unions organised a protest rally in the context of the Thessaloniki International Fair on 9 September 2023, claiming wage increases and demanding that the high cost of living be addressed, and public goods and services be safeguarded.

Labor Centres and Federations held rallies on 15 and 17 December, 2023, in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other cities to express their reaction to the 2024 budget voted on in Parliament and to demand measures to address the high cost of living.

Pensioners held a nationwide rally on 24 November 2023 in Athens, demanding substantial increases in pensions and measures against the high cost of living.

The ADEDY and the Athens Labour Centre, along with other labour centres, Federations and Trade Unions, called a 24-hour strike on 21 September against the new labour draft law that provided for a six-day work, employment for more than one employer up to 13 consecutive hours, imposing a fine of up to EUR 5,000 on strikers who are blocking work for non-strikers, demanding its withdrawal.

The ADEDY, along with the GSEE, the Labour Centres and Federations, held a 24-hour nationwide strike on 16 March 2023 for the deadly accident in Tempi, reacting to the conditions that led to it. Rallies took place all over Greece. The strike was preceded by dynamic mobilisations on March 8 and 12 by the ADEDY, the Athens Labour Centre, and other organisations (young people and students).

On 22 November 2023, nationwide protests were held by GSEVEE and other professional organisations of liberal professions, with the main request for the withdrawal of the new Tax Bill providing for an increase in their taxation.

On 6 December 2023, other bodies such as the Consumers' Institute - Hellenic General Federation of Consumers decided to hold a rally on 17 January 2024, outside the Ministry of Commerce, to express dissatisfaction with the continued high cost of products and to denounce the deception by food, fuel and electricity enterprises. Demonstrators demanded transparency in product pricing. They also demanded that independent authorities such as the Hellenic Telecommunications & Post

Commission, the Competition Authority, the Regulatory Authority for Energy, Waste & Water, the Ombudsman, the Consumer Ombudsman, and the National Council for Radio and Television act effectively to protect consumers.

Developments in working time

Changes to legislation

Over the last three years (2021-2023), the adoption of Laws 4808/2021 and 5053/2023 brought about significant changes in working time.

The **Law 4808 of 19 June 2021** provided for:

Part-time employment working time: the law provides that, if there is a need for additional work beyond what was agreed upon, the part-time employee is obligated to provide it, if he/she is able to do so and refusal would be contrary to good faith. In any case, this additional work may be carried out up to the maximum limit of completing the full daily working hours of a comparable full-time employee. The additional work beyond the agreed is remunerated by an additional hourly pay of 12%. Part-time workers may refuse to perform additional work of that agreed, when the additional work is carried out in “a usual manner” (i.e., systematically). In any case, this extra work may be carried out up to a maximum of full daily working hours.

Working hours: The legal working hours, which constitute the maximum allowable duration of employment are 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week. The general applicable rule is the **contractual work of 40 hours per week** (eight hours/day in the 5-days schedule or six hours and 40 minutes/day in the 6-days schedule) but there is also the possibility for a company to implement through a collective agreement a flexible working time arrangement, as it is foreseen by previous Law No. 3986/2011, which is still in force. The Law 4808/2021 (art. 55) reconfirmed that the full contractual working hours of 40 hours/week as noted above. All wages are calculated to the basis of 40 hours of work per week. Any excess of the daily and weekly contractual working hours entails the employer's obligation to pay additional compensation. Daily employment hours of employees must not exceed ten (10) hours.

Overwork and overtime work: Overwork is defined as the work provided beyond the contractually set weekly working hours (40 hours) and up to the completion of the legal working hours, i.e., 48 hours for a six-day work week or 45 hours for a five-day work week. For each hour of overwork, the employee is entitled to the hourly wage increased by 20%. Overtime work refers to employment beyond 48 hours per week and 8 hours per day (for employees with a six-day work week) and beyond 45 hours per week and 9 hours per day (for employees with a five-day work week). The legal overtime work is up to 150 hours annually and the employee receives an hourly wage plus a 40% increase. The Law 4808/2021 (art. 58) introduced significant changes on the overtime work. For all workers, including workers in industry, daily legal overtime can reach three (3) hours and the annual one hundred and fifty (150) hours. In cases of an urgent nature of work, after permission from the Ministry of Labor for overtime beyond 150 hours per year, employees for the relevant hours of overtime shall be entitled to the contractual hourly rate increased by 60%. The employer is obliged to register in the ERGANI electronic system the employees' legal overtime, before the start of overtime employment. Every hour of overtime work for which legal requirements are not met (maximum limits indicated above & relevant declaration to ERGANI) is considered illegal overtime, for which the employee shall be entitled to the contractual hourly rate increased by 120%.

Organization of working time: The Law 4808/2021 (art.59) introduced new changes on the organization of working time. In the context of the arrangement of working time, the possibility of 4-

day full-time employment of 40 hours per week and 10 hours per day is provided, at the request of the employee. It is not permissible to work more than 10 hours per day and 40 hours per week allocated on a 4-day basis. If there is no trade union organization in the company or no agreement has been reached by collective agreement, the arrangement of working time provided for in the Law 1892/1990 can be implemented at the request of the employee, by individual agreement. In this case, the employer must examine the requests of employees for the conclusion of an individual agreement and, for the convenience of the parties, may notify the employees, on the one hand, of the possibility to submit an application and, on the other hand, on the ground of the business needs for the implementation of a system for the arrangement of working time. The employer is obliged to submit the agreement for the arrangement of working time to the ERGANI system.

Working break and daily rest: The Law 4808/2021 (art.59) provides also that, when the daily working time exceeds four (4) hours, employees must be granted a break of at least 15 minutes and up to a maximum of 30 minutes, during which they are entitled to leave their work. These breaks cannot be provided consecutively at the beginning or end of the workday to ensure they serve their intended purpose as intervals of rest during the regular workday. Employees working full days but with split shifts, either every day or on some days of the week, are entitled to rest intervals between their work segments. These intervals must not be less than three (3) hours in duration.

The new **Law 5053/2023** of 26 September 2023 laid down new rules concerning working time arrangements in various categories of undertakings.

Work in the sixth day: the Law 5053/2023 (art. 25 and 26) establish distinctions regarding the conditions under which employees may legally work on the sixth day. This is permitted for employees of continuously operating businesses that implement a five-day work system, provided that this work is reported by the employer in the electronic platform of Ministry of Labour (ERGANI) before the employees begins their shift. In contrast, for businesses that are not inherently continuously operating but may operate from Monday to Saturday on a 24-hour basis with a system of rotating shifts, and where employees work a five-day weekly schedule, the law sets an additional condition. The sixth-day work must be justified by exceptional circumstances due to an unexpectedly significant increase in the workload of the business. This provision does not apply to hotel and food service businesses. For work on the 6th day, employees are compensated with their daily wage increased by 40%. However, they are not entitled to compensatory weekly rest.

Bargaining outcomes

In Greece, the collective agreements on working time usually include the relevant general conditions laid down in the national legislation.

Debates on duration and organisation

Intense debates and reactions were triggered during the discussion of draft laws 4808/2021 and 5053/2023 regarding working time among the social partners, mainly trade unions.

As far as the provisions of Law 5053/2023 are concerned, per the representatives of the SEV and other employers' organisations, the arrangements for extending employment on the sixth day and Sundays to other undertakings are positive, so that undertakings are more competitive, subject to compliance with the permitted limits.

On the one hand, the GSEVEE expressed reservations as to the increase in overtime and the expansion of businesses operating on Sunday, arguing that such arrangements could act as a deterrent to the creation of new jobs. On the other hand, according to the GSEE, employment on the sixth day and Sundays should take place after approval by the Supreme Labour Council. Moreover, the GSEE stressed the need for the Labour Inspectorate to return to the Ministry of Labour's political supervision and increase inspections. The GSEE objected to the arrangement of working time through individual employment contracts where, due to the inherent inequality, it is expected to turn to a managerial right. The GSEE supports the regulation of working time through sectoral employment contracts.

Other important policy developments

Regulations on employment status and contracts

On 26 September 2023, through Law 5053/2023, the Government transposed Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union into national labour law, which provides, among other things, for:

- Reduction of the probation period from 12 to 6 months (Article 4).
- Introduction of a new term “work pattern” (πρόγραμμα οργάνωσης του χρόνου εργασίας) in Article 3 and listening of the working conditions for which there is an obligation for employers to inform employees according to the system of organisation of the working time. The article includes two work patterns. In the “Fully predictable work pattern” (Πρόγραμμα οργάνωσης εξ ολοκλήρου προβλέψιμο), the employer must inform the employee of the duration of the regular daily or weekly work, any arrangements for overtime, additional work and their remuneration, and any arrangements for changes in working hours. In the “Wholly or mostly unpredictable work pattern (or work “on demand”)” (Πρόγραμμα οργάνωσης εξ ολοκλήρου ή ως επί το πλείστο μη προβλέψιμο (αλλιώς εργασία “κατά παραγγελία”)), the employer must inform the employee that the working hours are variable; indicate the number of guaranteed paid hours and remuneration and the remuneration for work in excess to that; provide the necessary information about reference hours and days, the minimum notice period before the assignment of work, the right of veto by the employee if the conditions are not met, and the compensation for the cancellation of a work assignment before it begins. Moreover, the employee is entitled to compensation if the work assignment is cancelled after notice, and there must be a collective agreement for a minimum number of paid working hours, failing which the contract is null and void.
- The workers’ possibility of engaging in parallel employment and lifting the ban on working with a different employer outside their working hours, provided that the provisions on working time and rest period of workers are respected.

Policies to reduce the gender pay-gap

According to the Gender Equality Index (2022) on Labour, Greece is in the penultimate position of the European Union with a score of 65.6%, compared to the European average of 71.7%.

According to a 2023 SEV survey (SEV 2023a) on the position of women in enterprises in Greece titled “Operation Equality,” female workers receive lower pay and are under-represented in positions of responsibility and still face many stereotypes. More specifically, the average gross full-time salary for women is EUR 1,115, i.e., 13% lower than the respective salary for men (EUR 1,284); half of the enterprises (53%) have no or very limited (less than 15%) participation of women in the board of directors, and one in ten companies (11%) does not trust a female leader in any directorate or department of the undertaking.

In addition, while nine out of 10 enterprises agree that gender equality in enterprises is essential, more than eight in 10 (83%) have no specific targets or monitor specific gender equality indicators.

The Directive adopted by the European Council on 24 April 2023 with the new rules on pay transparency which aims at strengthening the application of equal pay for equal work between men and women with the ultimate goal of eliminating pay discrimination and closing the gender pay gap in the EU, is expected to be transposed into national law in three years.

Health and safety regulations and policies

The laws 5053 and 5043, passed by Greek Parliament in 2023, introduce, among other things, two new measures concerning the health and safety of workers.

Article 32 of Law 5053/26.1.2023 provides for protection for workers during natural or technological disasters or exceptional weather conditions, imposing on employers an obligation to comply with emergency measures taken by the competent authorities, with penalties for infringement.

In addition, Article 96 of Law 5043/2023 provides for the granting of paid leave of one day for female workers in the private sector (already in force in the public sector) to carry out an annual gynaecological check, with a view to protect the family.

Work-life balance related policies

In 2023, the Law 5078/20.12.2023 provides, among other things, for the extension of the special maternity protection benefit from the DYPA [Public Employment Service] to all salaried workers (including in-house lawyers) and self-employed mothers, own-account workers or farmers insured with the electronic National Social Security Institution (e-EFKA). This special maternity protection benefit is granted for nine months after the end of the maternity grant. It concerns the subsidised absence of the mother from work, with payment of the minimum wage by the DYPA. A mother can transfer up to seven months of this special benefit to the father, regardless of her husband's employment status. The measure entered into force as of 1 January 2024. Earlier, in 2021, the Law 4808/2021 introduced significant changes in work-life balance, which concern among other things women adopting children, paternity leave, and parental leave.

Life-long learning and skills development

In 2023, which was also the European Year of Skills, there were several initiatives aimed at upgrading and developing skills and promoting lifelong learning.

In January 2023 the National Strategy for Youth Employment was published, aiming at tackling the high youth unemployment rates, increasing employment of young people, facilitating the access of young people to the labour market and their economic integration, as well as at improving their skills and employability.

Earlier, in 2022 the Law 4921 concerning the Public Employment Service (DYPA) provided among other:

The establishment of a "National Workforce Skills Council" (Article 27), in which the national social partners are represented and aims to provide a National Skills Strategy and establish a digital Skills Account. This body is appointed by a decision of the Minister of Labour, consists of 17 members, including 15 members representing the government and two members representing social partners (GSEE and employers) and meets at least once a year. Its role is advisory on issues related to ongoing

vocational training, reskilling and upskilling of the workforce in the context of the Labour Force Skills Strategy. The National Council cooperates with the sectoral Skills councils.

The establishment of a “Scientific Committee on Labour Skills” (Article 28). The Committee provides scientific and advisory support to the National Council (see above), has a four-year term, is appointed by the Minister of Labour, and consists of 11 members, including at least two from GSEE institutes and at least two from the institutes representing employers.

In addition, at legislative level, the Law 5053/26.09.2023 provides that where an employer’s obligation to train the employee arises for them to perform the agreed work, such training shall be free of charge to the employee, counted as working time and provided within contractual working hours where possible.

Other topics

One of the most important developments for the completion of this report for 2023 is **“Adoption of the Directive (EU) 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union”** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions, which specifies the obligation to inform employees in individual fields and modifies the deadlines and the way employees are informed when employment contracts are concluded or amended.

This law, in addition to the provisions introduced and described elsewhere in the report, also includes regulations on other important issues of working life in Greece, such as:

Combating the brain drain.

The article 20 of the Law 5053/2023 introduces the creation of a digital platform by the Ministry of Labour called “Rebrain Greece” as a mechanism to boost talent and connect scientists/employees residing in Greece and abroad with jobs in highly skilled occupations offered by undertakings operating in Greece. The digital platform is interconnected with the labour market needs diagnosis mechanism, the “ERGANI II” Information System, and the Independent Authority for Public Revenue. The entry of the qualifications and skills sought by businesses is carried out based on the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations-ESCO classification. This initiative of the Ministry of Labour seeks to address the difficulty of finding staff with specialised skills. It is intended for Greeks who have emigrated and work abroad and those living in Greece.

It should be noted that the flight of Greek citizens and the brain drain phenomenon continues in Greece. According to estimates, between 2008 and 2020, approximately 500,000 Greeks have emigrated abroad to seek work (SEV 2023b).

Reinstatement of seniority based allowances.

The article 33 of the Law 5053/2023, reinstates the mandatory payment of the seniority allowance (referred usually as “triennial allowance”) to employees, the granting of which had been suspended since February 14, 2012. It is noted that the seniority-based allowance provides increases both to the statutory minimum wage based on years of employment and to wages set and foreseen by certain collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). Under the minimum wage provisions, the rate automatically increases every three years of an employee's work experience with all employers, up to a total of 30% (reached after nine years of experience for monthly-paid workers and 18 years for daily-paid workers).

The reinstatement of the above allowance will be in accordance with the following conditions:

- The work experience of each employee, as it was determined on February 14, 2012, when the obligation to grant the triennial allowance was suspended, continues to accumulate after January 1, 2024.
- The work experience of each employee hired after February 14, 2012, starts to be calculated for the period after January 1, 2024.
- The work experience completed from February 14, 2012, until December 31 2023, is not considered for the increase in wages or the provision of the seniority allowance.

If the regular remuneration paid exceeds the legal minimum wages, the increases resulting from completing three-year periods and the resumption of the seniority allowance are offset against the difference between the amounts paid and the legal remuneration.

In addition, other important initiatives were legislated in 2023 such as the filling of vacancies by third-country nationals, as well as the abolition of benefits of workers that have been in force for many years. Analytically:

Residence permits with right to work for immigrants.

The Law 5078/20.12.2023 introduces a provision of the Ministry of Migration which allows persons who have not entered Greece legally (i.e., without a residence permit) to obtain a three-year residence permit to be able to work in Greece. Beneficiaries must live in Greece and demonstrate that they have worked in Greece for three years. The regulation concerns approximately 30,000 irregularly staying third-country nationals who have resided in Greece until 30 November 2023 inclusive and fulfil the necessary conditions.

Abolition of allowances of the Public Employment Service (PES).

Ministerial Decision 113582 of 29 December 2023 provides for the abolition of three allowances granted by the DYPA [Public Employment Service]. The allowances abolished are:

- Special allowance after the end of the regular unemployment subsidy
- Special assistance after three months' stay in the register of unemployed persons
- Special assistance in the case of retention or cessation of the undertaking's operations

Commentary and outlook

In 2023, the Greek economy felt the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the increase in energy prices, persistent inflation (especially in food and services), and intense natural disasters (floods, heatwaves and fires) due to climate change. These factors added to the ongoing impacts of long-term fiscal adjustment programmes implemented by the country from 2010 until 2018. Nevertheless, gross domestic product (GDP) increased by approximately 2.2% over the first nine months of 2023, and this positive trend is expected to continue in 2024, with a projected GDP increase of 2.7%. Simultaneously, unemployment declined to 9.6% in October 2023 compared with 11.8% in October 2022, and the minimum wage increased by 9.4% in comparison with 2022, reaching €780 from April 2023.

However, despite an unemployment rate of around 10%, there are labour shortages for both skilled and low-skilled workers, especially in sectors such as tourism and agriculture, according to the social partners, and employers particularly. One of the main reasons for these shortages is low wages in general, as well as the low minimum wage in Greece, compared with the high cost of living. The labour shortage was the reason the government legalised approximately 10,000 immigrants, who were already working in Greece.

According to various opinion polls and studies conducted in 2023 by different bodies (social partners, professional organisations and consumer associations), the positive economic performance cannot offset the serious problem of persistent price increases in goods and services. These increases have weakened the purchasing power of workers, disproportionately raised the cost of living, intensified economic inequalities, and contributed to the impoverishment of a significant portion of the population.

The inflation rate during 2022 (9.6%) was a key issue during the consultation for setting the minimum wage, with the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) demanding an increase of about 15% (from €713 to €825), while the increase proposed by employer organisations ranged from 5% to 8%. Ultimately, the government raised the minimum wage by 9.4% (from €713 to €780).

Collective agreements continue to cover a low percentage of employees (estimated at a maximum of around 30%), due to the fact that most signed collective agreements have not been declared generally mandatory for all employers. The majority of sectoral collective agreements signed during 2023 foresee wage increases compared with the previous year (13 out of 19 sectoral and professional collective agreements).

Regarding labour law in 2023, several significant changes were passed, the most important of which include the adoption of the EU Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions; the possibility of a second employer employing workers, with a total limit of 13 hours per day and 48 hours per week; the extension of the application of the digital work card to the retail trade and industry from 1 January 2024 (affecting about 100,000 companies with 600,000 employees); and the calculation and monitoring of working time based on the digital card (regular hours and overtime).

Social dialogue in Greece continues to be rudimentary in most cases, while the government continues to underutilise the opportunities it presents. This issue, combined with demographic change, technological lag, the deterioration of public services such as health and education, and housing problems, poses the greatest challenges for the future and creates widespread insecurity.

The government as well as the social partners accept that top priorities for 2024 include the need to take drastic measures to address price increases and improve the living standards of workers, as well as implementing measures to address environmental risks, promote the green economy, and invest in the technological upgrading and digitalisation of businesses and the economy.

References

- Bank of Greece (2023), Monetary Policy, Interim Report for the year, Athens, December 2023
- EEA (Athens Chamber of Tradesmen) (2023), RESEARCH to investigate the impact of high prices on citizens' lives, new tax measures and the financial situation of businesses in the Attica Basin, (December 2023)
- EKPIZO (2023), "Household basket" survey , (January 2023)
- ELSTAT (Hellenic Statistical Authority) (2023a), 'Labour Force Survey: 2nd quarter 2023', press release, 14 September 2023
- ELSTAT (2024a). Living conditions in Greece, 2 May 2024
- ELSTAT (2024b), Consumer Price Index: December 2023, Piraeus, 12 January 2024
- ELSTAT (2024c), Labour Force Survey: November 2023, Piraeus, 4 January 2024
- GSEE (General Confederation of Labour)(2023), GSEE indicators, (November 2023)
- IME GSEVEE (Institute of Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants) (2024), Annual Household Income & Living Expenditure Survey 2023, (January 2024)
- INE GSEE (Labour Institute of GSEE) (2023 a). Annual Report 2023 The Greek Economy and Employment (September 2023)
- INE GSEE (2023 b). Bulletin of Economic Developments of INE GSEE (November 2023)
- INE GSEE (2022). The strike action in Greece, (October 2022)
- SEV (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises) (2023a), Operation Equality, (July 2023)
- SEV (2023b), Brain Drain Study in Greece, (May 2023)

WPEF24047

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.