



Discrimination of pregnant workers and new mothers/fathers

Carolina's story

My name is Carolina. I am a polish citizen living and working in Cyprus. At the time I got pregnant, in 2011, I was working in a private company in Nicosia.

Upon showing medical certificate to my employer, she tried to intimidate me saying that she had the right to fire me because HER INTERNAL company policy allows her to do so. When I mentioned the legislation, she got very upset. I was never allowed to attend doctors' visits during working hours: for any visit or test that I attended, the time spent was deducted from my Annual Leave, despite always bringing medical certificate. I was exposed to several comments on my appearance: « you are becoming huge as a barn », Executives in my company kept on telling me.

In 2011 there was a huge power failure in Cyprus and power was cut on a daily basis in the whole country for 4-5 hours during daytime. It was July – August, when temperatures here reach around 40 -45 degrees. During one of these failures, the whole staff was let go home, except me: I was commanded to stay in the hot building, without air conditioning. I was 7 months pregnant. I complained and I was informed that I could leave my job at any moment. My previously approved Annual Leave (I gave 2 months' notice before requesting it) was cancelled just 4 days before it was planned and, again, I was told that I could always leave my job.

The Social Insurance forms necessary to obtain my Maternity benefits were withheld by the Company. When I asked them to be released, the comment was: « it is not sure that you will deliver a living baby ».

During my last working week, I was hospitalized and again the employers, who should have signed the forms for Sick benefits to the Social Insurance, withheld it and therefore I lost 50% of my entitlement.

My 13th salary benefit was cut by the months I was on Maternity Leave.

My employer refused to count Maternity Leave as a working period and denied my Annual Leave entitlement for this period. I contacted the Labour Office and I got dismissed by my employer 1 day before returning to work. In the end, I got payment for 3 months that were statutorily under protection of the law.

I must conclude that even governmental bodies likewise the Equality Labour Inspectors here in Cyprus showed lack of respect and comprehension: on 2 of my 4 complaints, I was told « you could expect that treatment, as getting pregnant ».

I would never have expected so much disrespect and unfavourable treatment by a state authority. This only leads to the conclusion that I might decide not to have another baby, in order to avoid all this stress. If other women share my concerns, the population will obviously decrease.