

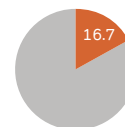
## “ Country recommendation

Greece should take action to reduce child poverty, especially in the regions of Central Greece, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

## Country Profile 2023



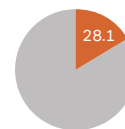
# Greece



### Child Population:

**1,748,720**

16.7% of total population



### Child Poverty:

**491,390**

28.1% (2022)

▼ -3.9% compared to 2021

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[The Smile of the Child](#)

[Network for Children's Rights](#)

[ALMA](#)

## Children's Rights in Greece

In Greece, the Ministry of Justice in cooperation with the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Migration and Asylum; and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs adopted the [National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child](#) that covers the period 2021-2023.

The National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA) under the recently established Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family has been designated as National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee.

### Child participation

The only widespread form of child participation in public life in Greece is the Youth Parliament. Established in 1994, it enables children from all high schools in Greece to actively participate in

political life. For children under 12 years old, there is no possibility for participation. Eurochild members in Greece suggest that active citizenship and participation should be cultivated from preschool-aged children and that children's councils should be exercised in local to state-level decision-making processes.

A promising development for children's participation in decision-making was a public consultation to inform Greece's Child Guarantee National Action Plan, held in June 2022. The President of Greece, the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, and representatives of Parliament listened to children, including those at risk of poverty, expressing their needs and concerns. Over 400 attended, including local authorities and civil society organisations.

### Child safety and well-being online

Children face considerable dangers online such as exposure to inappropriate content and cyberbullying, predatory and addictive behaviours and several challenges to mental health. [Children aged 12](#) and above overuse online applications more than recommended. The Smile of the Child's own [research](#) shows that children who are bullied spend many hours on screens. 46.1% of children (ages: 9-10, 14-15 and 17-18) in all regions of Greece spend excessive hours on screens, and have lower levels of general well-being.<sup>1</sup> There is a gap in empirical data for online use, safety and mental health, and overall well-being in children younger than 12.

To address the existing gaps, the legislation to protect children in online environments must be prioritised. Education on and

prevention of risks associated with internet usage should be provided.

### Child protection systems

Children in residential care in Greece usually live in institutions until they reach adulthood, with harmful consequences and unacceptable cutbacks in the protection of their rights and best interests in general. The main barriers to the de-institutionalisation of these children and their smooth social reintegration are:

- the low number of foster carer applicants and the lack of professional foster care especially for children with disabilities;
- the lack of training for prospective foster and adoptive parents on special needs of children with disabilities (autism, physical disabilities, learning or sensory disabilities);

<sup>1</sup> The Smile of the Child, [Understanding and Measuring Child Well-Being in Greece: Empirical Findings for 2022-2023](#), August 2023; Eurochild, [School violence and bullying on the rise in Greece](#), 2023.

- no sufficient living arrangements outside institutions for older children;
- no public rehabilitation services in case the child is placed in foster care or adopted;
- the lack of targeted prevention, support and monitoring interventions for vulnerable families in the community;
- a weak recording system that lacks information on poorly functioning foster/adoptive placements.

Existing policy frameworks include the Law on adoptions and fostering, which aims to record more accurately children in child protection services and support deinstitutionalisation. The new Law 4837/2021 envisages the creation of Semi-Autonomous Living Hostels for young people over 15 years old. It also established a Juvenile Protection Officer in each unit of the Child Protection Institutions.

For persons with disabilities, the Institution of Personal Assistants was introduced.

The National System for Recording and Monitoring Reports of incidents of child abuse has been established. However, children who are victims of violence and abuse do not receive adequate treatment and support. Newly opened Independent Offices of Minor Victims, or “Children’s Homes” in Athens should be aligned with the Barnahus model methodology.

Despite positive developments, the child protection system still copes inefficiently due to its fragmentation. Child protection services are designed for different groups of children: children in institutions, Roma children, children on the move, and child victims of abuse. Moreover, the lack of coordination and communication between ministries and public

authorities leads to delays or non-implementation of legal provisions.

Eurochild members in Greece recommend streamlining current legislation into a holistic legal framework to create a comprehensive child protection system. There should be a centralised agency to undertake all the responsibilities regarding children’s rights, their protection, and the promotion of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to coordinate other authorities at the national, regional and local levels.<sup>2</sup>

### Children in migration and refugees

In 2022, new pieces of legislation concerning the migration population and unaccompanied children were introduced.<sup>3</sup> This new legislation regarding reception and asylum procedures

poses restrictions when it comes to children’s rights and their entitlement to basic services and as regards procedural guarantees.

Civil society had called for specific consideration and appropriate safeguards in asylum proceedings to be provided for children. However, none of these suggestions were included in the legislation. Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) should be granted a protection status regardless of asylum procedure with an extension of their protection status until the age of 21 or 23, like in other EU countries such as Italy and Spain.

In total, there are 1,624 unaccompanied children in Greece. This figure referred only to the accommodated unaccompanied children, while still there are unaccompanied children who live outside

<sup>2</sup> As recommended in line with the UNCRC Concluding Observations for Greece (2022):

[https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/crc\\_c\\_grc\\_co\\_2-3.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/crc_c_grc_co_2-3.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> The law regarding the reception conditions, international protection of third country nationals and stateless persons and for the temporary protection in the event of a mass inflow of displaced third country nationals; Law on the National Guardianship System for the Unaccompanied children (UASC), as well as the JMV for the Framework for Hosting of UASC.

registered accommodation facilities. Most of the 6,330 Ukrainian children who have arrived in Greece are 0-13 years old (81%) and half are girls. By the end of 2022, there were nine children from Ukrainian institutions in Greece.

As stated in the 2022 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's [concluding observations report](#), public authorities are not treating all children with a migrant background equally - children from Afghanistan and Syria do not receive the same support and services as children from Ukraine.

Refugee children have access to education regardless of their asylum claims, although issues exist in the enrolment on the islands and while children are not registered or their asylum request has been rejected. The lack of transport to and from schools from campsites, either closed or not, where children are housed is a practical barrier, as centres are mostly based in remote areas. A more systemic approach is necessary.

Families seeking asylum should be provided with adequate housing to remedy the closure of the 'ESTIA apartments programme' in 2022. Housing deprivation hampers integration and access to education for children in these families, as they are forced to relocate from urban communities for camps in more remote areas.

As part of its work, the Network for Children's Rights together with UNHCR and other non-governmental organisations played an instrumental role in the creation and implementation of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) to protect unaccompanied children under the Ministry of Asylum and Migration.

### **Climate change and children's rights**

Greece has been hit hard by the consequences of climate change. Climate changes deserve an adequate policy response. More awareness raising and training, such as on recycling and reforestation, should be added to the school curriculum to inform

children how climate change impacts their everyday lives. Training by the Fire Department in child-friendly language for children, teachers, and parents should be provided.

At the end of September, the Greek National Coordinator of the Child Guarantee organised a meeting to identify the needs of children in the Thessaly region that has been flooded.

### **Children's access to healthcare**

A recent study by [the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative](#) revealed the most frequent mental health conditions of Greek children include attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, disruptive behaviour, depression, and bullying. Alarming, the daily practice of 22% of health professionals in the study involves the assessment of suspected child abuse and neglect. Educators agree on the scarcity of training and support to aid in identifying and addressing students' mental health problems, and child abuse and neglect.

Parents identify that stigma is a barrier in Greek society, and they too need support to tackle their own stigma towards mental health.

ALMA calls for urgent action with a focus on early intervention in order to create supportive family and community environments to combat stigma for children with disabilities and with mental health problems.

There is a need to establish clearer definitions on mental health issues at a national level, and to improve the availability of data on mental health for children.

When it comes to access to health-care services, children with disabilities face additional challenges. Lack of public services force families to use private health services for children's rehabilitation. Furthermore, the shortage of specialist doctors in the Disability Certification Centers (KEPA) causes significant delays in issuing disability certificates and entitlement for specialised benefits and care.

Increased investment and awareness raising in health and mental health services for children is needed to make them more accessible in rural areas, and for vulnerable/low-income groups such as Roma and children with disabilities.

### Early childhood development

The recently launched 'Kypseli' programme aims to develop and enhance the capabilities and skills of infants and toddlers mainly through play and with respect to the uniqueness and regularly monitor and evaluate the development and progress of infants and toddlers. The National Council for Preschool Education and Training is a new advisory and consultative body. The *Neighbourhood Nannies* initiative has been established to deliver home care services for infants and toddlers.

In order to ensure an inclusive educational environment, the integration of children with difficulties from a very early age must be a priority. ALMA designed a training programme

*Starting from the kindergarten together* providing basic knowledge on developmental and intellectual disabilities and autism for educational staff of the nurseries. This project aims to raise awareness of the community on issues related to neurodiversity with the training of useful tools and methods for more effective support of infants on the autism spectrum in order to cultivate acceptance of diversity by creating collaborative relationships within and beyond the school community. This initiative is a pilot project between ALMA and the nurseries of the Municipality of Palaio Faliro in Athens. The future goal is to expand it nationwide.

### Education

While primary and secondary education is compulsory in Greece, there are children who face difficulties in accessing it. The rates of school attendance for Roma children are significantly lower than the national average. Only 32% of Roma children are enrolled in pre-school. There is

also a distinction between Roma girls, as they are pulled out of the school system sooner than male students.

In this regard, the Government should align with the *2020-2030 EU Roma Strategic Framework* to ensure better educational outcomes for Roma students.

To ensure all children have access also to online education the measures should be taken for children with disabilities, of minority status, with language barriers, or weak digital connectivity.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – Experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Greece

Greece has a total child population of 2.8 million, 28.1% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2022. Despite these worryingly high figures, the rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Greece has

decreased since 2021 (32%), which is the lowest rate since 2015.

Research from the Smile of the Child recommends that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion need to be made more visible within the public sphere and corresponding policies and investments. These groups of children are most exposed to child poverty are:

- children of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace - 14.4%;
- children suffering from deprivation of safe and smooth home conditions in Central Greece - 10.9 %;
- children of large families face difficult economic circumstances - 12.4%;
- children with only their mother in a single parent household - 13.9%;
- Elementary school children - 8.3%;
- children with disabilities;
- children with migrant background.

The National Observatory for Child Well-being puts forward four policies and tools that

are expected to tackle high rate of child poverty, relating to [tackling energy poverty for children](#); providing financial and psychological support for families of children with disabilities, children with psychiatric or other health issues; improving child well-being focused policies through the use of artificial intelligence.

## The European Child Guarantee

### Greece's National Action Plan

2023 marked the third year of the European Child Guarantee's implementation, and two years since Member States were requested to submit their National Action Plans (NAPs) to outline how they would address child poverty at national level. Greece's NAP was published on 21 September 2022.<sup>4</sup>

The NAP includes several measures that have already been implemented to reduce child poverty and social exclusion, namely actions and services related to pre-school education and childcare, health care, nutrition, and housing. It also includes new measures, such as the full vaccination coverage of uninsured children, and the full provision of their special treatments such as speech therapy. A Special Roma Secretariat has been established in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, to coordinate Roma social integration activities.

The [NAP fails to mention](#) the shortages of social services, and the lack of coordination among public authorities. Concerning the target groups, children in correctional facilities are not currently considered.

The NAP does not introduce specific indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of its measures. In general, although a NAP on the Rights of the Child was established in 2021, as well as the National Mechanism for the Monitoring and Evaluation of this Action Plan, a central database on children with disaggregated data on all areas of the UNCRC has yet to be developed. This is despite successive recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 2003, 2012, and 2022 concluding observations.<sup>5</sup> The NAP should also strengthen efforts to improve children's right to be heard and speak out, including those from vulnerable backgrounds.

## European Semester 2023 – Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The 2023 Country Report for Greece includes an accurate overview of early childhood development. Of note is that for children aged 3+ and 4+, Greece recorded one of the best improvements in participation in early years' services in the EU.

However, there are a lot of gaps in its depiction of the situation for children living in poverty and/or social exclusion in Greece. The Country Report does not mention deinstitutionalisation. Education receives partial coverage. For children with a migrant background, including child refugees, the report notes concern for their limited

<sup>4</sup> The lists of Child Guarantee National Coordinators and National Action Plans, where published, are available at the bottom of [this page](#).

<sup>5</sup> Where it recommended 'that the State party establish a central database on children with disaggregated data on all areas of the Convention and its Optional Protocols and develop indicators consistent with the Convention': [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/crc\\_c\\_grc\\_co\\_2-3.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/crc_c_grc_co_2-3.pdf).

access to post-secondary and tertiary education. Other key concerns, such as the lack of legal documentation proving the application for international protection, lack of access to health and social services, child participation, impact of the pandemic on children's well-being are not included.

There is a reference to the digital skills without linking them to children's rights or safety in the digital environment.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The Country Specific Recommendations document corresponds to the general reform needs in Greece but unfortunately it fails to identify reforms regarding the children.

