

UNICEF Greece
Country Programme
2022-2026

unicef  | for every child

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The Situation Analysis of Children in Greece and Country Programme 2022-2026 have been prepared in collaboration with the Greek State and have included consultations with civil society as well as children and youth.

The Greece Country Programme 2022-2026 has been reviewed and endorsed by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Migration and Asylum
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs
Ministry of Health

2022-2026

UNICEF and Greece:

A Shared History

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is the UN Agency mandated with the protection of the rights of all children around the world. UNICEF works directly with Member States and a wide range of partners to ensure all children have the best possible chance to survive and thrive. Established by the United Nations General Assembly in **1946** through UN Resolution A/RES/57(I), its initial mandate was to address the critical needs of children in the aftermath of the Second World War, later expanded by subsequent resolutions to the current mandate advocating for the rights of all children, everywhere. This included the provision of humanitarian assistance to an estimated one million children and mothers in Greece from the end of WWII until **1959**.

As such, UNICEF's mandate is part of the larger mission of the United Nations and is guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. Today, UNICEF is present in 191 countries and territories, including Greece, working with partners to translate commitments to the rights and wellbeing of children into practical action, focusing on the most vulnerable and excluded children.

Greece, as a member of both the United Nations and the European Union, has a record of pursuing sustainable development and equitable growth in line with international and European policies and strategies over the past decades. Mirroring this leadership, the Greek people themselves demonstrated a strong commitment to the world's children through their direct support of UNICEF's global role promoting child rights from **1977** until the present day.

In **1989**, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most ratified convention in the history of the United Nations and one which changed the way children are viewed and treated, recognizing them as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of passive recipients of charity. As the UN organization designated to safeguard the rights of every child, UNICEF is specifically named in the CRC (Article 45) as the principal source of technical assistance and financial resources to Member States on child rights. Globally, UNICEF works closely with state entities and civil society, providing support to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the CRC.

Greece, one of the founding UN Member States that created UNICEF in 1946, has from the very beginning been a key partner in its global efforts to support children and has played an integral role in determining the shape and reach of the organization, serving on its Executive Board six times from 1946 until its most recent tenure in 2018. This common pursuit to advance the cause of children was reaffirmed in **1993** when Greece ratified the CRC, ushering in a new era of accountability for all children on its territory.

In late **2015**, responding to the influx of refugees and migrants which included a high proportion of children, UNICEF became operational in Greece for the first time since the 1950s, working closely with government, civil society, and other UN agencies to ensure children were put at the forefront of the response agenda. UNICEF invested in key priority areas – child protection, education, gender-based violence prevention and response, and generating evidence to inform planning and advocacy.

Following these years of renewed collaboration, UNICEF and the Government of Greece agreed to formalise the agency's presence in the country for the first time, effective from January **2020**. The UNICEF Greece Country Office reports to the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia located in Geneva, which supports the work of some two dozen Country Offices within its geographical scope and is in turn accountable to UNICEF's global Headquarters in New York. Within the framework of its mandate for all children in Greece, UNICEF and Greece are now moving towards even greater collaboration to address the needs of all vulnerable, marginalized and left-behind children in the country.





1946

The United Nations General Assembly creates UNICEF

1946-today

Greece has served six times on UNICEF's Executive Board since 1946



1947-1959

UNICEF provides food, clothing and medical aid to over one million Greek children and mothers in the post-WWII years



1977-2018

Hellenic National Committee for UNICEF



1989

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Greece in 1993



2019

20 November 2019: The Acropolis turns blue to celebrate 30 years of the CRC

2016-present

UNICEF supports the refugee and migrant response in Greece



2020

20 November 2020: Launching the first UNICEF Greece Country Office, a new milestone in our shared history



The Situation of Children & Youth in Greece



Early Childhood Education



Under-investment in quality early childhood education impacts the ability of children to start school ready to learn and develop to their full potential. Any lost early years can never be fully recovered later in life. This reality is compounded in children from vulnerable groups who are more likely to enter the education system already behind in a host of critical skills they need to succeed in primary school and beyond.

Encouragingly, positive initiatives such as the full integration of kindergarten into the compulsory education system being rolled out by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs will help address this critical gap. In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will introduce a curriculum in nurseries to ensure a quality early start for the youngest children. Still, issues of access to nurseries persist, highlighting the need for the creation of more places and the development of a monitoring mechanism to respond to the demand for quality services for children under the age of four, including those from vulnerable groups.

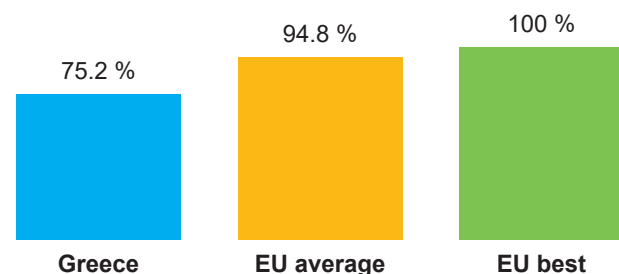
48,000

Children affected yearly



*Greece ranking among the EU (2018)

% of children participating in two years of pre-school

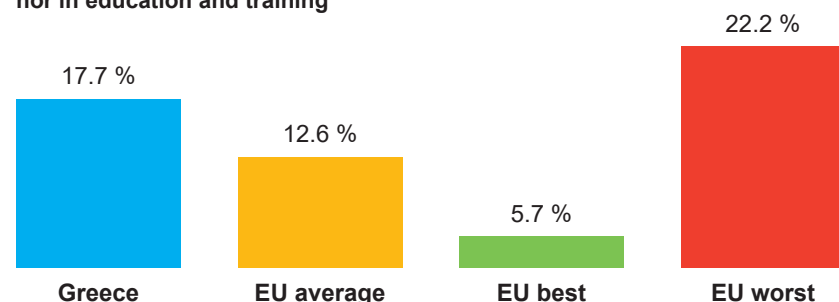


There has been an increasing focus on young people and youth-led initiatives both at national and European level in recent years, yet educational, professional and social inclusion outcomes for young people in Greece still lag behind national and European aspirations.

Stereotypes and perceptions persist that children's participation is difficult, costly, and demanding of resources and expertise. Gender stereotypes, in particular, limit boys' and girls' aspirations and create barriers to their participation and life choices.

There are limited platforms for genuine youth participation at the national or municipal level. Usually, platforms that engage youth are run by civil society organizations but do not lead to real influence on decision-making in the public sphere. This in turn disincentivises young people from engaging with or trusting formal institutions, including those that provide training opportunities. Youth networks, advisory boards and participation platforms need to be strengthened and clearly connected with decision-making bodies at the national, regional and local levels, as well as inside schools and other educational and academic institutions, grasping every opportunity to nurture and champion innovative collaborations of children and young people with their communities and with youth-led organizations.

% of young people (15-29) neither in employment, nor in education and training



Youth Participation



295,000

Young people affected



*Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

Violence Against Children



Lack of comprehensive national data on children affected by all forms of violence.

The right of children to protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect has been long promoted by a strong legal framework in Greece. However, a fragmented child protection system is not adequately covering the needs of children at national and sub-national levels. In addition, the absence of systematic disaggregated data on violence against children and access to protective services for children contributes to challenges around planning, designing, and implementing child-focused interventions. There is a pervasive silence in society around child victims of violence. Corporal punishment is still socially accepted and psychological violence is not usually recognised as a form of violence, meaning that under-reporting of violence against children can be considered a certainty.

Harassment, abuse, and exploitation of children online has become an emerging concern globally and specific strategies need to be developed, at the national level, to address these issues. Gender-based violence, child marriage and child trafficking are additional forms of violence that continue to affect children in Greece today. Children from vulnerable groups, including refugee, migrant, and Roma communities, face further protection risks, particularly those in unsafe or precarious living conditions.

Youth Unemployment



The Government of Greece, along with the European Union, has recognized the importance of young people in the workforce, notably through the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the Child Guarantee and the National Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth 2017-2027. Yet despite the creation of targeted strategies and actions, youth-related policies enjoy limited government support (including financial) and have marginal impact.

One of the main challenges facing young people in the country is the lack of employment opportunities and alternative pathways from learning to earning. In 2019, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 in Greece was more than twice the EU average. With 35.2 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds out of work, Greece had the highest rate of youth unemployment in the EU-27 in 2019, affecting some 387,000 young people in the country in that year. In addition, Greece ranks second-to-last among the EU-27 regarding the percentage of young people (15-29) Neither in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET), affecting 295,000 young people every year. Vocational Education and Training (VET) has a relatively lowly status, and participation in the VET pathway of upper secondary education is relatively low by EU standards. The mis-match of skills remains a huge challenge for the Greek labour market, and Greece has a low rate in all three pillars of the European Skills Index.

Strengthening youth-friendly public policies and developing innovative solutions to empower young people, strengthen their 21st-century skills, improve access to quality training and job counselling opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, and employment as well as support entrepreneurial mindsets are all critical ingredients to changing this national narrative.

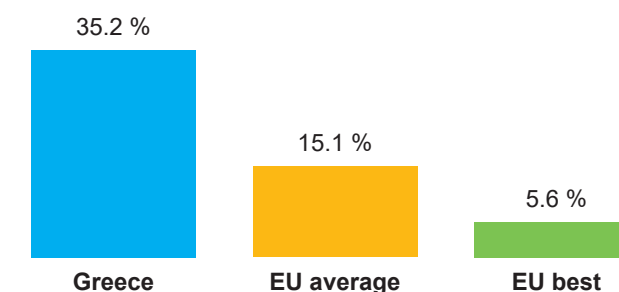
387,000

Young people affected



*Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

% of young people (15-24) out of work



Quality Education

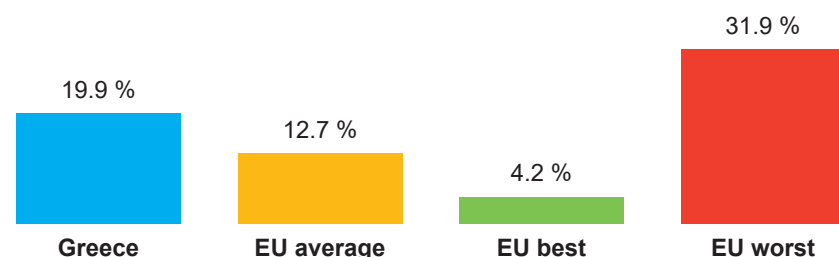


Greece's education system accommodates some 1.2 million school children. While equitable access is supported by a strong legal framework and political commitment, the quality and relevance of learning across the primary and secondary system requires substantive reform to ensure that every child develops their full potential and becomes an active citizen.

Measured as a percentage of GDP or on a per capita basis, Greece significantly underspends on its children's education, with a cascade of negative implications for children in the short and long term. A significant number of students continue to underachieve in reading, science and mathematics. Publicly available disaggregated data around formal education in Greece is insufficient and prevents a clear understanding of educational access and quality.

Significant budget cuts during the economic crisis have taken a toll on public expenditure on educational infrastructure and resources. While Greece has a relatively inclusive school system, the prevalence of certain social and cultural behaviour encourages negative stereotypes which can affect access to education from marginalized groups. For example, xenophobic attitudes from local communities directly affect children from refugee and migrant or Roma backgrounds, and not all children with disabilities or with special learning needs are routinely attending schools leading at times to invisibility, despite the legal provisions in place to ensure their physical access.

% of 15-years-olds underachieving in all three domains (reading, science, mathematics)



*Greece ranking among the EU (2018)

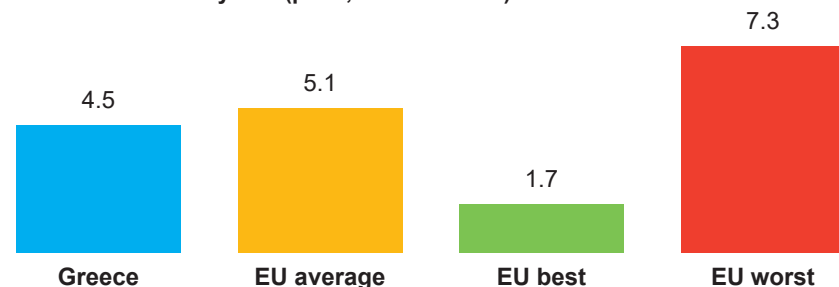
Child Mortality



After decades of steady progress, the child mortality rate in Greece experienced a small increase from 2012 to 2017, after which it began to fall again. By 2019, the under-five child and infant mortality rates were at similar levels to the EU average, with approximately one child out of 250 live births dying before reaching their fifth birthday. Arguably the most important indicator of overall wellbeing for children in any country context, performance on under-five child mortality depends on multiple parallel investments and interventions in a child's early years across a number of domains.

Therefore, a positive trend reflects improvements in many areas of child survival and development, including the nutritional health and education of mothers; the level of immunization and other essential treatment to prevent and treat diseases; the availability and quality of maternal and child health services (including prenatal care); and the overall safety of the child's environment. For that reason, the knowledge and practices of caregivers within the home and continuous improvement of access to quality basic services are critical to continued progress.

Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)



380

Children affected yearly



*Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

Childcare Reform



1,689

Children living in institutions

It is estimated that up to **450,000*** children in the EU are living in residential care.

*UNICEF ECARO estimation based on available data

Child Poverty



Despite the favourable legislative environment, including recent laws on guardianship and foster care, barriers to fully operationalise and implement childcare reform at scale remain. The primary underlying causes include lack of a common reform vision, fragmentation of accountabilities and services, and insufficient cross-sectoral planning and monitoring mechanisms. This is exacerbated by chronic under-funding for child welfare services leading to inadequate staffing of social services at regional and municipal levels. Limited infrastructure and lack of investment in the professional development of frontline workers remains a challenge.

Traditionally, the childcare system heavily relies on institutional care and any attempts to ameliorate it were focused on improving the existing functions rather than develop a truly child-centred approach to reform. Limitations on community-based options impact the most vulnerable groups of children, including those with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds. Social norms and beliefs in Greece persist as barriers to ensuring children's full access to adequate care and protection in a family setting. Negative stereotypes about children who have grown up in institutions, and limited support on developing life and employment skills, impact their ability to integrate into society upon ageing out of such facilities.

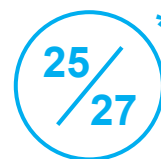
Greece remains one of the three EU Member States with the highest proportion of children living in poverty. The child poverty rate is one of the most critical indicators of a society's health and well-being, and also an insight into the lives of society's most vulnerable members. Looking to the future, it is a predictor of shared prosperity and social cohesion of society as a whole, as children are the next generation of adults that build societies and drive development.

Children are more likely to live in poverty than adults and they are also more vulnerable to its effects. Poor social service delivery exacerbates the vulnerabilities of children most in need by denying them opportunities and impacting on their access to quality services, translating into geographic disparities across Greece, widening inequalities and lowering intergenerational mobility. Among the children most at risk are migrant children, Roma children, children living in institutions, those living in temporary accommodations, or on the streets: children that often remain invisible in national poverty assessments.

Childhood is a time of unique opportunity and vulnerability, and experiencing poverty in its various dimensions is particularly damaging to a child's development, ranging from impaired cognitive development to behavioural difficulties, from poorer health outcomes to underachievement in school, from limited skills to higher risks of welfare dependency. Yet child poverty is neither inevitable nor immune to policy interventions. As many countries have already shown, it can be reduced and even eradicated through continued attention, sustained investment and action.

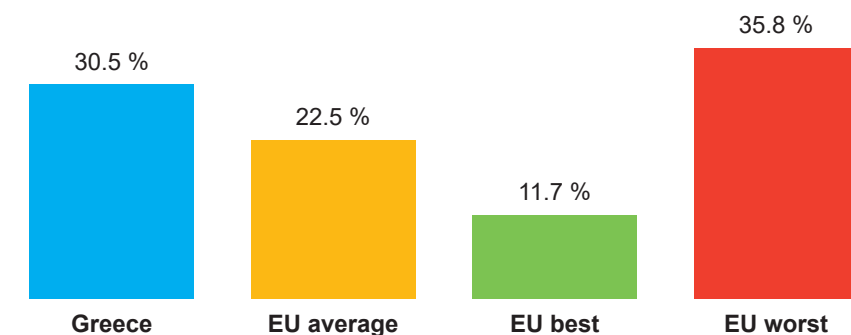
568,000

Children affected



*Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion



Child Nutrition & Mental Health



Childhood and adolescence are periods of critical importance to cognitive and physical development. Beyond the obvious human rights imperative to protect and promote the health of children and adolescents, an investment in the policy domains of nutrition and mental health clearly links to social and economic outcomes of a society over the lifetime of a child.

Poor nutrition and/or eating habits in early years can lead to overweightness and obesity. In Europe, Greece has the highest rates of childhood and adolescent (2-14 years old) overweightness and obesity (37%). The affordability and availability of high-quality nutritional food for low-income families remains a challenge for many. Being overweight or obese not only carries medical consequences but also affects the social and psychological lives of children. It also increases the risk of overweightness later in life, a condition associated with non-communicable diseases and considerable health and economic disadvantage for individuals, families and society. Preventative health strategies are needed to decrease further obesity, and proactive public health initiatives needed to treat obesity-related issues and associated co-morbidities.

Mental health is emerging as an issue of key concern in Greece, multi-dimensional in nature, and exacerbated by crises including the economic recession as well as, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to an observed increase in anxiety, stress and loneliness linked with a decline in participation in physical and other activities. There are growing concerns over the deterioration of the mental health among children, adolescents and their families with symptoms of withdrawal, self-harm, aggression, and depression. Across Europe, one in five adolescents are experiencing mental health conditions, and only one third of those in need receive primary care. There are significant gaps in the coverage and quality provision of mental health services in order to meet existing needs, with significant shortages of staff and services particularly visible in rural areas. Furthermore, the stigma attached to mental health issues remains very high.

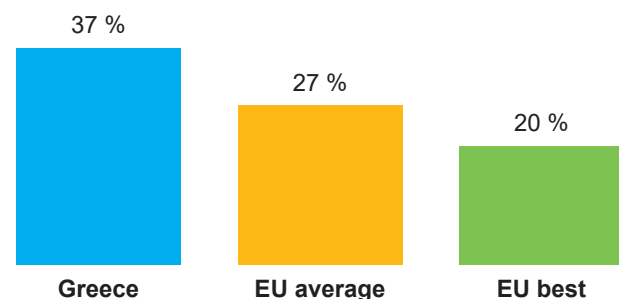
598,000

Children and young people affected



*Greece ranking among the EU (2016)

% of children and young people (2-14) who are overweight or obese



According to the 2020 EU Justice Scoreboard, there is room for improvement in Greece in addressing the needs of children who come into contact with the law. Children who participate in civil and criminal judicial proceedings as witnesses of violence, victims of maltreatment, custody cases and children suspected or accused of criminal proceedings, as well as children in situations of particular vulnerability, would benefit from receiving child-friendly information on their rights. With some specific interventions, a child-friendly justice system staffed by professionals properly skilled in considering a child's best interests, communicating in an age-appropriate manner, and receiving technical guidance by a specialized team, is within reach.

Gender Equality

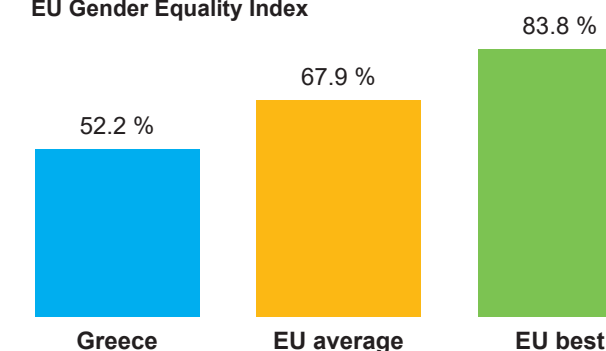


Gender equality is enshrined in the Greek constitution. Over many years, Greece has ratified a number international conventions aiming at improving the position of women in all sectors of economic, political, social and cultural life and tackling violence against women.

Despite having a strong legislative framework and a dedicated Secretariat on Gender Equality since 1985, Greece ranks last in the EU's Gender Equality Index. Entrenched social norms hinder equality of opportunity between men and women. Greece maintains a 'traditional' model vis-à-vis gender roles and the division of labour between men and women, resulting in one of the lowest participation levels of women in the labour market in Europe. The emphasis on women remaining in care roles within the home can be attributed not only to societal gender norms but also to the availability of childcare services, which are the lowest in the European Union.

Notwithstanding the existence of a National Network of Services tackling Violence against women, women in Greece are often reluctant to reporting claims of abuse or violence due to the fact that there is a significant lack of appropriately trained police coupled with the rarity of prosecution or punishment of perpetrators. Targeted awareness-raising on the existence of services, and systematic data collection and analysis, are necessary to inform policy decisions on the support provided to survivors of gender-based violence in offline and online environments.

EU Gender Equality Index



*Greece ranking among the EU (2020)



The Way Forward

A Vision for the Future



The Way Forward

A Vision for the Future

Despite considerable progress in fulfilling the rights of children in Greece in the post-WWII era, there is a significant unfinished agenda when it comes to ensuring the full implementation of those rights as required under the CRC. As such, the first ever formal framework of cooperation between UNICEF and Greece provides a new platform of collaboration to address the systemic barriers that continue to leave children behind. This includes reinforcing national capacities for strategic policy planning and implementation in the areas of:

- Child poverty & social exclusion
- Quality inclusive education
- Protection from abuse and neglect
- Adolescent & youth participation

To achieve these aims, engagement with national and subnational authorities on cross-cutting areas including child protection, child and adolescent mental health, the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, and child rights monitoring and knowledge generation will be critical.

Achieving results for children relies on partnerships. The power of collaboration can allow every child to be reached, working with a wide range of partners to deliver on a universal mandate for children, focusing on the most vulnerable. Building a national movement for children, a whole-of-Greece effort crowding in all elements of Greek society – national and local institutions, civil society, the business community, philanthropists, academia, media, the Greek public, as well as children and youth themselves – is essential to create the momentum to address the structural, cultural, social and economic barriers that continue to block children in Greece from reaching their full potential.

Leveraging its global experience and technical expertise, UNICEF looks forward to supporting the implementation and monitoring of existing national plans (such as the National Action Plan for Child Rights), regional strategies (including the EU Child Rights Strategy) and global priorities (such as the Sustainable Development Goals) to achieve concrete results for children at scale, working with state institutions to fill policy and resource gaps as they are identified. This approach of building on what exists is the core of the programme of collaboration between Greece and UNICEF as we work towards meeting agreed targets by 2026.



01

Child Poverty & Social Exclusion



Child Poverty

Greece is implementing cross-cutting reforms and measures to tackle entrenched issues around child poverty and social exclusion, including as a participating member state in the EU Child Guarantee initiative that aims to ensure every child has access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition. The ongoing 24-month pilot programme is being implemented in Greece through a partnership with the Greek government, the European Commission, and UNICEF; exploring ways to showcase innovative practices and national action plans to reduce child poverty and address systematic disadvantages for children.

Within this context, a 'deep dive' analysis is being carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), Greek academia, and UNICEF to further understand the social and economic vulnerabilities of children and families. Evidence on policies, programmes, services, budgets, and mechanisms addressing child poverty and social exclusion will help identify and remove structural barriers as well as improve ongoing prevention and support interventions ensuring access to child and family services. Innovative and evidence-based models of services and interventions focussed on the most vulnerable children are being developed, implemented, and assessed in order to be translated into concrete strategies to combat child poverty. These will serve as examples for how the Child Guarantee can be rolled out across EU member states.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is reduced from **30.5** percent to **17** percent, reaching at least **250,000** children

Roma Inclusion

The issue of Roma inclusion in society has become a growing priority in Greece and across Europe. Building on previous strategies and action plans, the Government of Greece is finalizing a National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma for the period 2021-2030. The strategy will focus on four main pillars – education, employment, housing and health – in line with the EU Strategic Framework for the Integration of the Roma 2021-2030. Objectives include:

- Preventing and combating poverty and social exclusion of Roma and reducing the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population;
- Improving equal access of Roma to social services;
- Preventing and combating anti-gypsy and discriminatory behaviour; and
- Promoting Roma participation

Building on existing knowledge and evidence, and considering the scarcity of primary data on Roma in Greece, data collection and analysis of socio-economic vulnerabilities is ongoing to identify needs and monitor areas of priority action, which are also supported by UNICEF based on regional experience and good practices. Already identified priority areas include protection, justice, gender discrimination and gender-based violence, underage marriage and pregnancies, and children and youth exploitation. Specific actions being designed, implemented, and evaluated take into account meaningful Roma participation, including underrepresented vulnerable groups. Greece is also working on creating positive narratives to highlight the contribution Roma children, youth and women make to Greek society, challenging deeply rooted stereotypes.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Roma children's access to education is increased from **57** percent to **100** percent
- ✓ **80,000** Roma children and their families benefit from social services (protection, mental health, transition to employment) as well as opportunities for participation

Refugee & Migrant Children

Greece is implementing different social integration measures across ministries and sectors including health, education, and protection for refugee and migrant children. These are highlighted in the latest National Integration Strategy unveiled in 2019 under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum noting that "integration is a key aspect, as it is also the international benchmark to decide on the overall success of a country's migration policy". The strategy is underpinned by the fundamental right of refugees and migrants to employment, education, health, and social services with a focus on improving communication and participation in the public sphere.

There are a variety of policy instruments, innovative approaches, and social interventions being utilized to promote the integration of refugee and migrant children and their families. In partnership with UNICEF, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs are creating learning tools and materials as well as promoting inter-cultural and inclusive approaches to education which support refugee and migrant children's integration into Greek public schools.

Similarly, with UNICEF support, the Greek government is promoting comprehensive services for refugee and migrant women and children to address protection needs and support their psychosocial wellbeing and skills development.

Significant efforts have been made to respond to the unique needs of unaccompanied children in Greece, including the establishment of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in 2020 with which UNICEF is closely collaborating to promote sustainable solutions for those most vulnerable of all.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Refugee and migrant children's access to education is increased from **42** percent to **100** percent
- ✓ All refugee and migrant children benefit from services, particularly protection, as well as empowerment and participation activities

02



Quality Inclusive Education

Early Childhood Education

Success in school has its roots in a child's earliest years, which builds the foundation for lifelong learning, improved educational achievements, well-being and social engagement. Greece is advancing participation in early childhood education through recent legislation which extends formal education to include two additional years at the pre-primary school level, thus including children from four years of age into the compulsory education system.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, in collaboration with UNICEF, are making efforts to boost quality early learning, through strengthening national harmonized standards for nurseries and focusing on the importance of early development for all children, including those under four years of age.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Access to early childhood education is increased from **75** percent to **100** percent, reaching **48,000** children **4-6** years old

Quality Inclusive Education

Every child in Greece has the right to learn, develop his or her full potential, and be equipped for the transition to young adulthood. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MoERA) promotes quality inclusive education for every school-aged child, including those with disabilities or socio-economically disadvantaged.

To ensure full access to formal education for all children the implementation of compensatory policies and the monitoring of dropouts and out-of-school children and adolescents must be strengthened. In this way, the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, and children from Roma or refugee and migrant backgrounds, will be better addressed. In addition, tailored teacher training on inclusive education and intercultural learning is being carried out jointly by UNICEF, the Institute of Education Policy, and Greek universities to better equip educators on how to promote an inclusive / intercultural approach to learning.

To elevate the quality of learning outcomes across the student body greater emphasis must be placed on skills development, including 21st century skills, and on different learning styles and needs. In parallel, providing the necessary support to educational staff is essential. To this end, a mix of targeted policies, data collection and analysis as well as capacity building is envisaged.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures has particularly highlighted the need for flexible and adaptive educational tools, as well as a new range of teachers' and students' skills, to facilitate access to remote and digital learning programmes, as those provided by the MoERA. UNICEF in partnership with the MoERA and civil society organizations are also working together to promote digital learning to ensure continued access to quality education and learning for every child in every place in Greece.

At the same time, communication for development (C4D) initiatives are being designed to address social perceptions that reject multi-culturalism, perpetuate exclusion and segregation, or solidify gender stereotypes.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ The proportion of low-achieving **15-year-olds** in reading, mathematics and science is reduced from **20** percent to **17** percent
- ✓ The national PISA scores for **15-year-olds** are increased from **453.3** to **525.6**

Child Rights Education

Child Rights Education (CRE) is based on the teaching and learning of the provisions and principles outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Many studies have shown that a rights-based education has positive outcomes for children including, an increase in tolerance, improved behaviour in class and well-being, higher self-esteem, and an increased understanding of democratic principles and citizenship. CRE is centred on a 'whole school' approach and is implemented at all levels of formal education. Greece is taking steps to include CRE in school curricula, teaching practice, and the learning environment leveraging UNICEF's global expertise and experience in this field.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ **1.2** million students have increased awareness of their rights and are empowered through Child Rights Education (CRE)



03

Child Protection



Childcare Reform

UNICEF and the Government of Greece share a common vision of childcare reform, highlighted by their partnership in piloting the EU Child Guarantee initiative. One of the main pillars of this partnership is supporting the Greek state in its de-institutionalization efforts, including the development of comprehensive legal and normative frameworks aligned with national standards.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is advancing this agenda through legislative achievements and pilot programmes expanding the reach of community-based care models such as foster care and Supported Independent Living for older children. To accelerate the de-institutionalization process, the Ministry and UNICEF are working together to operationalize legal provisions and national strategies regarding the transformation of large-scale residential institutions into alternative care models. Additionally, family support and prevention mechanisms are being developed as well as a standardized set of case management tools within the overall framework of upskilling the existing social service workforce.

Knowledge generation is ongoing to inform government decisions on the resources required for such a transformation to be implemented at scale, ensuring that children in or at risk of institutionalization have improved access to community-based and inclusive services.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ The number of children living in residential or institutional care is reduced to **zero**, reaching at least **1,700** children

Violence Against Children

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Prevalence of children's exposure to psychological violence is reduced from **69** percent to **35** percent, and exposure to physical violence is reduced from **46** percent to **23** percent*
- ✓ Under-reporting of cases of violence against children is reduced by **40** percent through increased capacity of professionals, accessibility to services and awareness-raising

*National data on violence against children remains a gap and only fragmented information is available.

Child-Friendly Justice

Greece is committed to eliminating all forms of violence, particularly those affecting children and women. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child outlines specific priority areas relevant to Greece that include socially and culturally accepted forms of violence and online exploitation. Through a network of national partnerships, there are ongoing efforts to study the prevalence of violence against children in all forms to better understand the extent of this phenomenon in the country and adapt its national response.

Against the backdrop of increasing awareness around sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking, also affecting children, the Greek government is expanding information channels to improve knowledge of, and access to, state services. The partnership between UNICEF and the General Secretariat for Demographic and Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSDPFGE), is strengthening data collection and analysis to inform national policy planning around gender-based violence while tackling traditional social and gender norms that hamper equality between girls and boys, women and men.

Children in contact with the law should be informed in a child-friendly manner on their rights and feel comfortable to participate and be heard during judicial procedures, a fundamental component of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024. Within this context, the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF are assessing the Greek justice system in terms of its 'child-friendliness' to understand the key issues at play and develop an appropriate plan of action. Next steps include a needs assessment to identify specific training required for professionals working in the justice system which will be supported by UNICEF's global knowledge around age- and gender-appropriate interviewing techniques, procedural implementation, and case management for all sectors that interact with children and families in the context of judicial procedures.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ **100** percent of state professionals in the justice system in contact with children are applying child-friendly approaches and practices, ensuring that all children are protected, heard, and safe



04

Youth & Adolescents



Youth Employability

Job readiness for youth entering the labour market can be improved through integrated, modularized programmes that include: basic and life skills development, active job orientation and counselling as well as mentorship and apprenticeship. While recent initiatives like the 2020 law 4763 have made steps towards modernizing vocational training, it is imperative that these programmes are based on up-to-date market trends analysis and address local needs.

The Generation Unlimited global partnership provides an exciting opportunity for Greece and UNICEF to work together to unleash the potential of young people in the country, who are disproportionately affected by downward shifts in the economy and labour market. UNICEF and national authorities including the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) are partnering together to develop holistic job readiness and upskill programmes, while expanding job placement opportunities for young people through internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ **57,000** young people **15-24** years old benefit from increased access and participation in the labour market through skills development via enhanced vocational education and training (VET) programmes

Youth Participation

There is an ongoing public dialogue on youth issues through multi-stakeholder alliances, including young people, emphasizing the role of Greece's young generation in national and EU affairs and the promotion of social cohesion within and beyond the country's borders.

The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and UNICEF are exploring ways to bring in the perspective of young people on existing barriers to social inclusion and active citizenship which could be used to update national programmes and policies.

UNICEF and local partnerships, including municipalities, youth-led organizations, and networks, are promoting youth engagement with issues of growing social importance, such as climate change and risk resilience, internet addiction and/or the 'digital divide', psycho-emotional health, multiculturalism and migration, and inter-generational communication.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Neither in Employment, nor in Education and Training (NEET) rate is decreased from **17.7** percent to **10** percent, reaching at least **128,000** young people aged **15-29** years old



05

Transversal



Nutrition and Childhood Obesity

Overweightness and obesity have become a serious health issue among children and adolescents in Greece. Based on the 2019 National Health Survey issued by ELSTAT, 37.5% of children aged two to 14 were overweight or obese in the country in 2019.

Overweightness and obesity in children and adolescents are the result of the interaction between individual factors that regulate physiological processes, food preferences, and physical activity patterns over the life course, and an obesogenic environment that promotes high energy intake and sedentary behaviour.

Being overweight or obese in childhood carries medical, social and psychological consequences in the lives of children. It also increases the risk of overweightness later in life associated with heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension, and considerable economic disadvantage for individuals, families and society at large.

UNICEF, in collaboration with key line Ministries, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as with academic/research institutions and the private sector, seeks to advance the agenda of addressing childhood obesity in Greece.

UNICEF's global nutrition programming is grounded in a systems approach to improving nutrition outcomes. This approach captures interactions across four systems – the food system, the health system, the education system, and the social protection system. In Greece, that will mean a necessary focus on evidence generation on the root causes of obesity, adoption of evidence-informed policies and regulatory frameworks, delivery of services, practices and programmes that support optimal nutrition, growth and development for infants, children and their caregivers, and promotion of communication strategies that engage communities and families to adopt healthy dietary practices.

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Reduce prevalence of obesity among children aged **2** to **14** years from **37.5%** to **24.5%** by **2026**, reaching at least **176,500** children

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Impact by 2026

- ✓ Children, adolescents, and their families are sensitized to mental health issues and are aware of relevant services
- ✓ Children and young people have access to prevention and response services on mental health including through community-based interventions and mobile units

Child Friendly Cities Initiative

Impact by 2026

- ✓ At least **20** municipalities from all regions of Greece are measurably contributing to achieving national targets for children

Child Rights Monitoring & Knowledge Generation

Impact by 2026

- ✓ All children in Greece benefit from evidence-based, targeted, inclusive and equity-focused policies informed by an effective child rights monitoring system

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the urgent need to address mental health issues, particularly for young people and children, which is reflected in the Greek government's priorities and ongoing action. A number of national stakeholders, some in collaboration with UNICEF, are promoting greater public awareness of mental health and are planning innovative counselling services, such as through e-platforms, to increase access to timely information and guidance on mental health issues.

Psycho-educational programmes in schools, supportive counselling, and therapy, ideally with the involvement of the family, are existing tools to improve the mental health of adolescents, while the complex needs of young people with serious mental disorders can be addressed through stepped referrals to specialised services within the community. To support national efforts, UNICEF and partners will also use mobile units to reach children in remote areas and ensure they and their families can access community-based mental health services.

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) is a UNICEF-led process that supports municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. It is a network that brings together government and other stakeholders such as civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, media and, importantly, children themselves who wish to make their cities and communities more child-friendly.

In Greece, UNICEF is collaborating with Athens and Ioannina as the first candidate Child Friendly Cities in the country with more municipalities to follow. A strong CFCI network will help guide and support cities to create safe, inclusive and participatory mechanisms that serve the needs of every child in Greece.

Greece has a strong foundation in statistics, research, and evidence. However, gaps remain around disaggregated data for children to adequately inform national and sub-national planning. The Greek government is taking concrete steps to ensure availability of evidence to analyse barriers and inform national planning and priorities as well as monitor their progress, in line with the objectives of Agenda 2030 and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child as well as the latest CRC Committee recommendations. This includes the establishment of a National Mechanism for the Drafting, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans on Child Rights coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, which includes UNICEF as a member.

In addition, UNICEF is partnering with key stakeholders to advance this agenda including the Hellenic Statistical Authority, the Deputy Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, the Ministries of Justice, Labour and Social Affairs, and Education and Religious Affairs, as well as various research institutes and academia.

Some of these partnerships are working to generate knowledge through a series of research in key areas to support national development plans, including the formulation and monitoring of measurable targets for children. Innovative approaches to the dissemination and use of child-specific information, such as a data hub, are also being explored.

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