

**A SITUATION ANALYSIS**

**OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**GREECE 2020**

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## Acknowledgements

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With special thanks to the following national partners for their valuable contribution to the development of the Situation Analysis:

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Hellenic Statistical Authority

Deputy Ombudsperson for Children's Rights

# **A Situation Analysis of Children and Youth**

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# Acronyms

<b>AMKA</b>	Social Security Insurance Number
<b>ASPAITE</b>	Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education
<b>CAN</b>	Child Abuse and Neglect
<b>CEAS</b>	Common European Asylum System
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>CP</b>	Child Protection
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>DYEP</b>	Reception Classes
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>EEA</b>	European Environmental Agency
<b>EIGE</b>	European Index on Gender Equality
<b>EKKA</b>	National Centre for Social Solidarity
<b>ELSTAT</b>	Hellenic Statistical Authority
<b>ECHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>EODY</b>	National Public Health Organization
<b>EOPYY</b>	National Organization for Health Care Provision
<b>ERRC</b>	European Roma Rights Centre
<b>ESIF</b>	European Structural and Investment Funds
<b>ESL</b>	Early School Leaving
<b>ESPN</b>	European Social Policy Network
<b>ESY</b>	National Health System
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUCFR</b>	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
<b>EYZHN</b>	National Action for Children's Health
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FRA</b>	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>GDI</b>	Gender Development Index
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IMR</b>	Infant Mortality Rate
<b>IO</b>	International Organization
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate Partner Violence
<b>IYCF</b>	Infant and Young Children Feeding

<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MMR</b>	Measles, Mumps, Rubella
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs
<b>Mol</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoMP</b>	Ministry of Migration Policy
<b>MMR</b>	Measles, Mumps, Rubella
<b>MoLSA</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
<b>MoJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>NEET</b>	Neither in Education, Employment or Training
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NORC</b>	National Observatory for the Rights of the Child
<b>NRM</b>	National Referral Mechanism (for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings)
<b>NVP</b>	National Vaccine Program
<b>OAED</b>	Greek Manpower Employment Organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OPEKA</b>	Welfare Benefits & Social Solidarity Organization
<b>PA</b>	Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework
<b>PAAYPA</b>	Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number (for foreigners)
<b>PIP</b>	Public Investments Program
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>RIC</b>	Reception and Identification Centre
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SIL</b>	Semi-Independent Living
<b>SRSS</b>	Structural Reform Support Service (European Commission)
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>TEI</b>	Technological Educational Institute
<b>TFR</b>	Total Fertility Rate
<b>THB</b>	Trafficking in Human Beings
<b>U5MR</b>	Under Five Years Mortality Rate
<b>UASC</b>	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>YEI</b>	Youth Employment Initiative
<b>ZEP</b>	Zones of Educational Priority





## Executive summary

This report presents a narrative analysis on the situation of children in Greece as well as the identification of remaining deprivations of children and the underlying structural causes. Using a rights-based approach, the analysis focuses strongly on the fulfilment of child rights through an equity lens and looks at specific vulnerable groups including children on the move, Roma children, children with disabilities, and youth as well as thematic areas like the impact of COVID-19.

It shows that Greece has made considerable progress in addressing and improving the rights of children in the country; however, there is an unfinished agenda when it comes to ensuring their full realization as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the previous decade of financial recession and related austerity measures have played its part, Greece has one of the lowest levels of public expenditures on the social sector among EU Member States. Yearly financial commitments for children and child-specific policies and actions remains a gap in the country. This has a secondary impact on the implementation of existing policies targeting poverty reduction and social inclusion, particularly affecting marginalized groups. Despite a sizeable decrease in the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, from 37.8 per cent to 30.5 per cent between 2015 and 2019, this is still well behind the 18% EU target for 2020. Greece remains one of the three EU member states with the highest risk for children to live in poverty or social exclusion.

The analysis confirms the need for coordinated action for children from vulnerable and marginalized groups - e.g. children from Roma or refugee and migrant communities, children with disabilities, and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds – where there remain barriers around equal access to basic services such as health, education, and protection. Gender equality is also an area that requires improvement (Greece ranked last in the EU 2020 Gender Equality Index) in addition to ensuring women are protected from all forms of violence: physical, psychological, gender-based, domestic, femicide, rape, etc.

### Right to health and welfare

Childhood and adolescence are periods of enormous importance to individual development. Beyond the obvious human rights imperative to protect and promote the health of children and adolescents, an investment in these groups clearly links to the health as well as social and economic capital of the population for decades to come. Greece had made significant gains around child health over the last few decades but key areas remain a challenge.

The child mortality rate in Greece while declining until 2011, experienced a small increase during 2012 to 2017 after which it began declining again. Yet, today the Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) of 4.5/1000 remains higher than the Western European average of 3.7/1000, whereas the infant mortality rate is similar to the EU average (3.5/1000 in 2018). In addition, only 25% of mothers exclusively breastfeed for four months of a newborn's life.

Poor nutrition can also lead to overweightness and obesity, which is particularly high among children and adolescents in Greece: 37% of 5 to 19 year-olds are obese or overweight. Mental health remains of key concern in Greece; 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. That being said, the suicide rate among 15 to 19-year-olds in Greece stands at 1.49/100.000 – the lowest in the European Union.

### Patterns of inequalities

The health and nutritional wellbeing among girls and boys in Greece varies. For example, 41% of girls report their health status as moderate or bad compared to boys of the same age; whereas, childhood obesity is twice as likely to affect boys.

Marginalized children in Greece coming from backgrounds such as Roma or refugee and migrant as well as children with disabilities face additional hurdles when it comes to accessing health services, including hospitals. They are also more at risk of a range of health issues such as mental health disorders, reduced immunization, and poor nutrition, among others.

Inequalities can also be seen based on socio-economic factors; one in ten households report they are not able to access health services and unmet needs are 20% in the poorest income quintile, but only 3% in the richest households. The Roma population in particular is exposed to high levels of poverty and social exclusion, which adversely affect health and well-being while social norms and beliefs can hamper Roma children's access to critical health services (e.g. vaccination).

The role of women in specific communities, where patriarchal beliefs and attitudes are prevalent, (e.g. Roma) as well as their health care needs are not routinely deemed a priority. In addition, the exclusion of Roma and refugee and migrant populations as well as stereotypical views from healthcare providers on women and children from these communities can lead to lower quality of care.

Finally, there are geographical discrepancies in health care provision such as the uneven distribution of the health work force and resources in rural and island areas.

### Structural causes

Consistent reductions in total health expenditure, in part due to the previous decade of economic crisis, has led to Greece investing more than one third below the EU average (1,623 euro per capita).

The primary health care system in Greece has not been fully rolled out nationwide and does not sufficiently meet the needs of the population; in mid-2019 only half of planned centres were functioning, mainly in urban or semi-urban areas. There are also gaps in the provision of mental health services in order to meet existing needs, with significant shortages of staff and services particularly visible in rural areas.

While legislation from the Ministry of Health exists, the availability of high quality nutritional food for low income families, particularly in public schools, remains an issue at both sub-national and national level.

## Right to education

Education is a fundamental right for every child and free education to all citizens is a constitutional principle of the Greek state that includes 11 years of compulsory schooling. While Greece has made considerable gains in providing equitable access to education, there has been a demonstrable correlation between educational provision and individual outcomes that show socio-economic background is linked to educational performance and can considerably affect achievement levels.

Overall, Greece ranks 43rd in the world in the PISA ranking of learning outcomes (2018) for 15-year-olds; almost one in five children do not meet basic learning proficiency in mathematics, reading, and

science. School curricula contents and teaching methods do not always ensure the practical/adaptive skills and competencies needed to match labour market needs. The Greek education system is characterized by a centralized, top-heavy approach which can limit the autonomy and decision-making of schools as well as their ability to respond to local needs. In addition, after school tutoring is entrenched in the Greek education system with one survey showing 99% of pupils in their final year of school received some form of private tutoring in 2014.

Participation in Early Childhood Education for 3- and 4-year-olds in Greece has lagged behind European targets reaching only 75.2% in 2019 (below the EU average of 94%). Additionally, 67.6% of children 0-3 years old did not receive any formal childcare while only 14% received formal childcare for 30 hours or more per week in 2019. However, initiatives such as the full integration of kindergarten into the compulsory education system are being rolled out by the Ministry of Education beginning in 2018 and should start to bear fruit in the coming years.

### **Patterns of inequalities**

Children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, marginalized children, and children in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas are more likely to experience difficulties in accessing education. In Greece, the lack of data on attendance and dropout rates of vulnerable groups (refugee and migrant children, Roma children, children with disabilities, out-of-school children) hampers the planning and budgeting required to effectively respond to the needs of these children.

Private spending, primarily for after-school tutoring, accounts for one third of overall education spending; yet, 89% of households report difficulties in paying. Taking into account the emphasis on high test scores for university entrance, students from lower income families are adversely impacted by this practice.

According to an assessment by UNICEF, access to formal education for refugee and migrant children has been problematic (42% enrolled during the school year 2019-2020) with significant challenges faced in the Reception and Identification Centres in the islands.

In addition, children in rural areas are much more likely to leave school earlier than their urban counterparts (3.8% versus 11.2%). This affects refugee and migrant as well as Roma children living in remote areas who experience difficulties accessing public school (e.g. transportation).

While there are 90,000 children with disabilities or special education needs (31% girls and 69% boys) registered in Greek public schools, only 14.9% graduate from upper secondary or post-secondary education.

According to a Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey in 2011, 29% of Roma children in Greece completed primary education and only 2% of Roma youth completed secondary and higher education, with Greece routinely ranking particularly poorly among European countries with Roma populations. More recent data is not currently available.

Girls are achieving better educational outcomes compared to boys in Greece, outperforming in reading by 42 points on average in their PISA scores.

### **Structural causes**

Equitable access to education in Greece is supported by a strong legal framework and political commitment. However, there is an absence of long term vision and strategy for ensuring every child in Greece has an equal opportunity for learning accompanied by national targets and a sustainable budget. Additionally, the lack of publicly available disaggregated data around formal education in Greece prevents a clear understanding of educational access and outcomes.

Severe budget cuts during the economic crisis (10% between 2012-2016) have taken a toll on public expenditure on educational infrastructure and resources. Lack of available and appropriately-structured kindergartens for children 4 to 6 years old, insufficient numbers of teachers and antiquated curricula are some examples of areas that are underfunded or not prioritized.

While Greece has a relatively inclusive school system, the prevalence of certain social and cultural behaviours encourages negative stereotypes which can hamper marginalized groups from accessing education. For example, xenophobic attitudes from local communities directly affect children from refugee and migrant or Roma backgrounds. Additionally, some Roma families do not believe in the importance of continued education for their children beyond the attainment of basic primary competencies in maths and language. Girls are also less likely than boys to complete their education, as traditional norms continue to inflict domestic roles on girls. Finally, children with disabilities are not routinely accepted in schools and can become invisible in society, despite the legal provisions in place and efforts to ensure their physical access.

### **Right to protection**

The right of children to protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect has been promoted by a strong legal framework and reforms in the child protection system have been initiated. Yet, certain inequalities persist and an under resourced and fragmented child protection system in Greece is not adequately covering the needs of all children at national and sub-national levels.

In 2020, residential facilities for children without parental care accommodated nearly 1,700 children (845 boys and 844 girls). The majority of children in public institutions are younger than 6 years old while older children tend to be placed in private institutions (38% between 6-12 years old and 13% under 6).

At the end of 2020, 34 adolescent boys were in detention (there are no detention facilities for girls), with no data available on children in contact with the legal system as witnesses or subjects of crime. Incidences of abuse and violence against children in closed institutions is supported only by anecdotal evidence. In addition, 47 refugee and migrant unaccompanied children (only boys) remained in protective custody, however this practice has recently been abolished (as of end of 2020) and the number is expected to gradually drop to zero.

Domestic violence and discrimination were reported by nearly 4,900 women in 2019 while there were 817 complaints of violence against children registered by the helplines only in the first quarter of 2020. Based on a study (2018), past-year prevalence of schoolchildren's (ages 11, 13 and 16) exposure to violent behaviours was 70% for psychological violence, 47.4% for physical violence and 9.4% for sexual violence. Additionally, based on data provided by the Hellenic Police during 2019 and 2020, half (49.4%) of child victims were victims of physical violence, nearly a third (29.5%) of sexual violence, and a fifth (18%) of domestic violence.

Child labour in Greece persists in certain industries (e.g. agriculture, tourism) and with vulnerable groups, such as migrants, Roma and children without parental care, more at risk of being exploited; 12 enterprises in 2017 were fined for child labour.

Child protection concerns also include early marriage, child trafficking, and documentation adversely affecting children from refugee and migrant or Roma communities as well as cyber-bullying. Additionally, refugee and migrant children in unsafe or precarious living conditions (homeless, protective custody, RICs, etc.) continue to face a range of protection risks such as: gender-based violence; sexual violence and exploitation, mental health disorders, and psychosocial distress; among others.

### **Patterns of inequalities**

There is limited to no information on homeless children, children with disabilities (e.g. in institutions, from marginalized groups, accessing services, etc.), and children involved in judiciary procedures, to name a few, which prevents the provision of equitable protective services for all children in Greece.

There are limited services for hard-to-reach children in rural/remote settings and not all regions have public prosecutors for children. In addition, accessing services is more challenging for children with disabilities or non-Greek speaking children due to inappropriate infrastructure and lack of interpreters.

97% of child marriages that took place over the last 9 years concerned girls, who are also more likely to be victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. In addition, 25% to 42% of girls who originate from countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced continue to be at risk of FGM upon arrival in Greece. In 2019, 15.3% of registered cases of racist violence were against migrant minors from 12 to 17 years old (16 out of the 104) highlighting the prevalence of xenophobic behaviour in Greece.

### **Structural causes**

The child protection system in Greece suffers from fragmentation, scattered accountabilities, and lack of coordination which leads to systemic issues preventing an equitable, gender-sensitive and age-appropriate national response. The absence of systematic disaggregated data on children in institutions, violence against children, and access to protective services for children contribute to challenges around planning, designing, and implementing child-focused interventions.

Despite the favourable legislative environment, including recent laws on guardianship and foster care, there remain barriers to operationalization which lead to legally-binding, agreed upon interventions around protective care unable to be implemented at scale. The primary underlying causes to this bottleneck are a lack of planning, insufficient long-term resources and budget linked to planning, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. This is exacerbated by chronic under funding around childcare delivery leading to inadequate staffing of social welfare services at regional and municipal levels, limited infrastructure, and lack of investment in continuous professional development of frontline workers.

Ad-hoc and temporary solutions have been established to deal with the more pressing issues around protective care, particularly in responding to the needs of refugee and migrant children, that have created a parallel system of services. In addition, the over reliance on institutions has left gaps in community-based care at a sub-national level impacting numerous vulnerable groups of children, including those with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds.

Social norms and beliefs also create barriers to ensuring children's full access to adequate care and protection in Greece. Negative stereotypes about children who have grown up in institutions, correctional facilities and detention impact their ability to integrate into society upon ageing out of such facilities. Child marriage continues to be socially acceptable among certain communities (e.g. Roma) and patriarchal mentalities increase the likelihood of gender-based violence, including in the home. There is a pervasive silence in society around child victims of violence; corporal punishment is still socially accepted and psychological violence (e.g. humiliation, etc.) is not usually seen as a form of violence affecting children which has a knock-on effect of underreporting to national authorities.

## Youth

There has been an increasing focus on young people and youth-led initiatives both at national and European level. While certain progress has been made under the EU-wide 'Youth Guarantee' initiative and the National Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth (2017-2027), educational, professional and social inclusion outcomes for young people in Greece still lag behind ambitious targets.

In 2019, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 was 35.2%, more than twice the EU average of 14.5%; those not in employment, education or training (NEET) at this age accounted for 19%. The attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) remains low, with only 15 percent of males and 11 percent of females aged 15-24 enrolled in VET courses.

The engagement of children and young people in civic participation and decision-making is not routinely or comprehensively measured in Greece or across the EU-27 group. Based on the European Youth Flash barometer (2017), 54 percent of young people in Greece reported that they have not participated in any of the eight activities linked with social and civic participation during the past 12 months

### Patterns of inequalities

Unemployment disproportionately affects women and girls, particularly adolescents and youth; females aged 15-24 years old in Greece have a 10% higher unemployment rate compared to males. While a higher percentage of the youth population is unemployed in certain regions of Greece, Western Macedonia (53%), Central Greece (48%) and Western Greece (47%), the greatest absolute number of unemployed youth are located in Attica where the majority of the Greek population resides. The possibility of being NEET (for 15-24-year-olds) is 94% higher among young persons in rural areas compared to cities and 90% higher among foreigners in Greece.

### Structural causes

Despite the existence of targeted strategies and actions, there is no official definition or legal framework for youth in Greece. Thus, youth related policies have limited government support (including financial) and marginal impact.

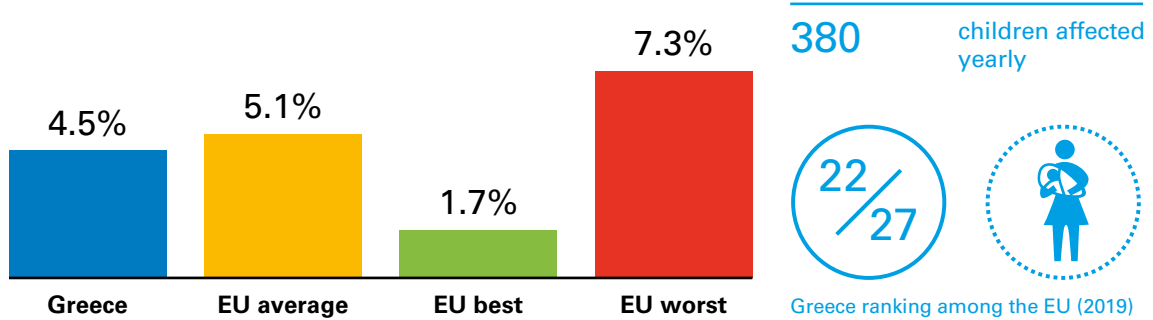
There are limited platforms for genuine youth participation at the local/municipal level; usually platforms that engage youth are run by civil society organizations but do not lead to a real influence on decision-making in the public sphere. This in turn disincentivises young people from engaging in groups or fora where available.

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

## Key data

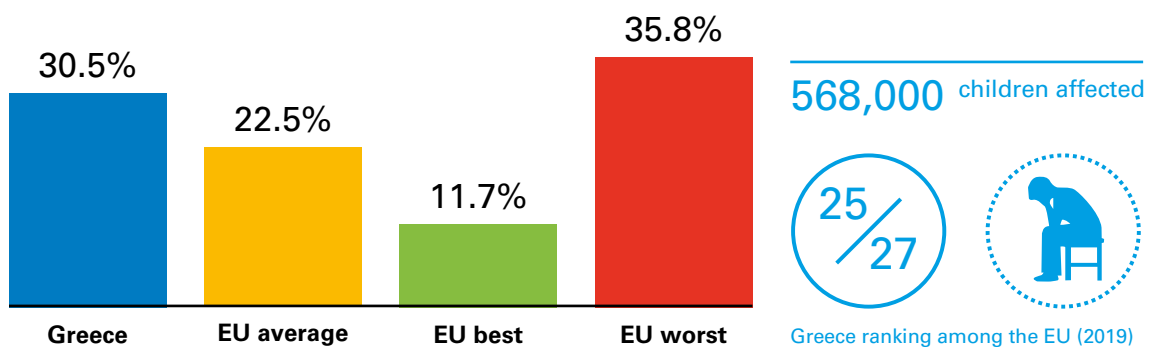
### Child Mortality

Under 5 Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)



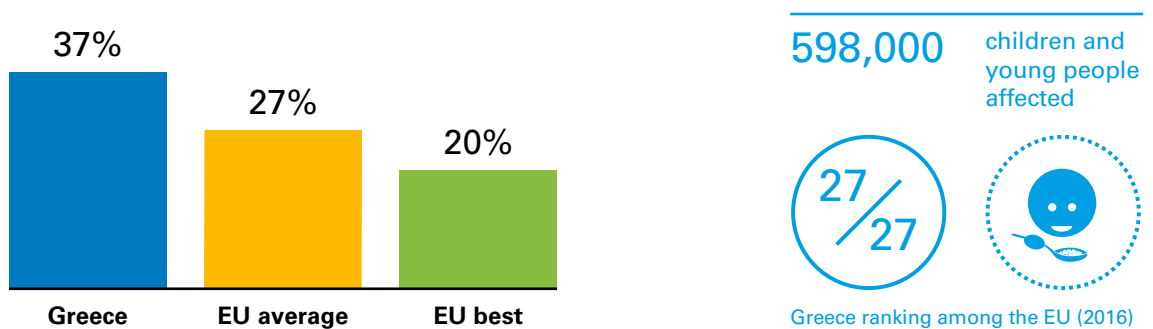
### Child Poverty

% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion



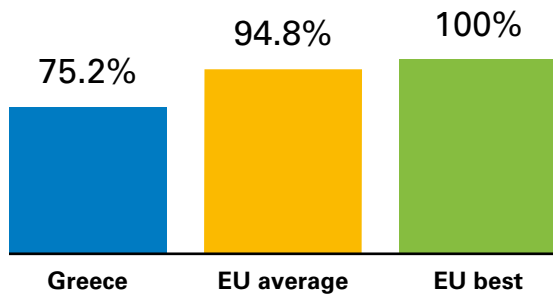
### Child Nutrition

% of children and young people (5-19) who are overweight or obese



## Early Childhood Education

% of children participating in two years of pre-school



48,000 children affected



Greece ranking among the EU (2018)

## Childcare Reform



1,689 children living in institutions

It is estimated that 350,000-450,000<sup>1</sup> children in the EU are living in residential care

1. UNICEF ECARO estimation based on available data

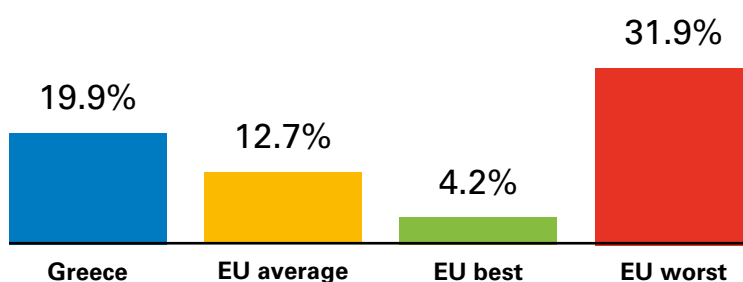
## Violence Against Children



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

## Quality Education

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



21,500 children affected

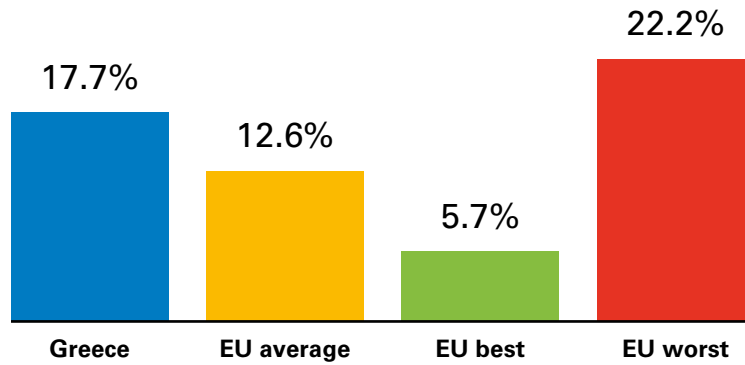


Greece ranking among the EU (2018)

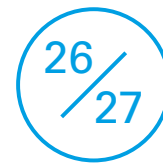


## Youth Participation

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



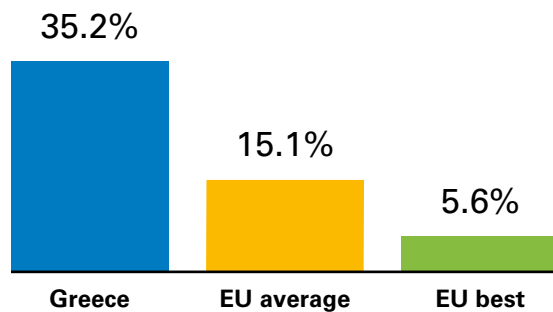
295,000 young people affected



Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

## Youth Unemployment

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



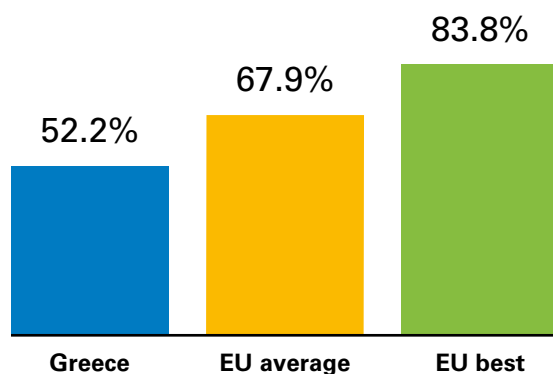
387,000 young people affected



Greece ranking among the EU (2019)

## Gender Equality

EU Gender Equality Index



Greece ranking among the EU (2020)



**CHAPTER 1.**

**GREECE AND UNICEF:**

**A BRIEF HISTORY**

# 1. Greece and UNICEF: A brief history

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is the UN Agency mandated with the protection of children and their rights as well as with meeting their basic needs and supporting children to reach their full potential. It was unanimously established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 through UN Resolution A/RES/57(I) to address the critical needs of children in the aftermath of the Second World War. 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, including Greece, working with partners to translate commitment to the rights and wellbeing of children into practical action, focusing on the most vulnerable and excluded children.

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, 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 only UN organization designated to safeguard the rights of every child, UNICEF is specifically named in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 45) as a source of expert assistance and advice. Globally, UNICEF works closely with state entities and civil society, providing technical and financial support to strengthen monitoring and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Greece, one of the founding UN Member States that created UNICEF, 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. UNICEF and Greece share a common pursuit of protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children; the country was one of the first signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Greece has supported UNICEF's work since its inception, serving on its Executive Board no fewer than six times from 1946 up until its most recent tenure in 2018.

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 for decades. Most importantly, the Greek people have expressed a strong commitment to children for over 40 years through their support of UNICEF's global role advocating for children around the world.

## **UNICEF in Greece 2015-2019**

In late 2015, responding to the influx of refugees and migrants, including a high proportion of children, UNICEF became operational in Greece, 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, child rights monitoring, education, gender-based violence prevention and response, and generating evidence to inform national planning.

## **From 2020 and beyond**

Following several years of engagement with national stakeholders, UNICEF and the Government of Greece made a decision in January 2020 to formalize the agency's presence in the country through an accompanying expansion of the mandate to a Greece Country Office. This office falls under the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia located in Geneva, which supports the work of 21 Country Offices within its geographical scope, reporting in turn to global headquarters in New York. Within the framework of an expanded mandate for all children in Greece, UNICEF and Greece

are moving towards an even greater collaboration and partnership in order to address the needs of all vulnerable, marginalised and left-behind children in the country.

## Objectives and scope

Against this backdrop, the newly established UNICEF Country Office undertook, for the first time, an analysis on the situation of children in Greece. This report is a flagship product which presents robust evidence and highlights opportunities for socially inclusive development to enable the rights of all children in Greece to be met. It serves to unpack and examine the bottlenecks to the full realization of child rights, as well as the interrelated roles of duty-bearer institutions. It aims to highlight inequalities between groups on the basis of socio-economic characteristics, urban/rural and intra-urban disparities, gender, geographic locations and other dimensions. Besides presenting an analysis of why inequities exist, it also presents contextualized recommendations on what could be done by key stakeholders to attain and sustain inclusive social development that guarantees equal inclusion and participation of all groups of children and adolescents. This report is grounded in Greece's political, economic and social realities and reviews progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as regional and global issues that affect children's rights and well-being. By having a strong equity focus, the Situation Analysis sheds light on the situation of children and young people who are most deprived, left invisible or uncounted for.

The main objective of this report is to provide a deep understanding of the situation of children and young people in Greece by analysing the policies, strategies and social and economic trends affecting them. It identifies and analyses the barriers and bottlenecks that prevent children (especially the most disadvantaged children and families) from benefiting from social services across sectors and enjoying their rights. Of note, the report aims to identify critical data gaps and ways to bridge those. Finally, it analyses to what extent there is an enabling environment for the realization of the rights of all children and adolescents, and how evidence-based interventions and services needed to address deprivations are prioritized in national policies, laws, strategies, plans and budgets.

The Situation Analysis aspires to be the reference document on children in Greece, useful to government bodies, development partners, including UNICEF, civil society, private sector actors and other stakeholders; it will inform policy dialogue and provide an evidence base for the policies, partnerships, programmes and interventions that will accelerate progress towards child rights and well-being; and can be used to support child-focused advocacy promoting positive change for children and the achievement of child-related goals with equity in Greece as well as to track progress around child rights' implementation. It enables UNICEF to convene, influence or integrate government and private sector institutions on co-investments in inclusive social services and opportunities for at-scale results for children and young people. As such, the situation analysis is a guiding document for action on child rights and well-being.

In light of the above objectives and scopes, the Situation Analysis will be disseminated across government bodies, EU institutions, UN Agencies and inter-governmental organizations and Embassies as well as to a broad range of civil society organizations including NGOs, trade unions, think tanks, private sector institutions and businesses as well as donors, and foundations.

## Methodology and process for development

The overall conceptual framework of the situation analysis is the Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming (HRBAP). This approach provides an understanding of the existing deprivations and inequities and establishes linkages between the underlying causes and barriers to achieving child rights. The conceptual framework situates the analysis in the country context and clearly recognizes the regional and global issues that are impacting children's lives in the country. Furthermore, it explores the reasons behind the uneven realization of child rights and inequities in well-being, and the opportunities for achieving progress for all children, especially those who are left behind or who are at greatest risk of being left behind.

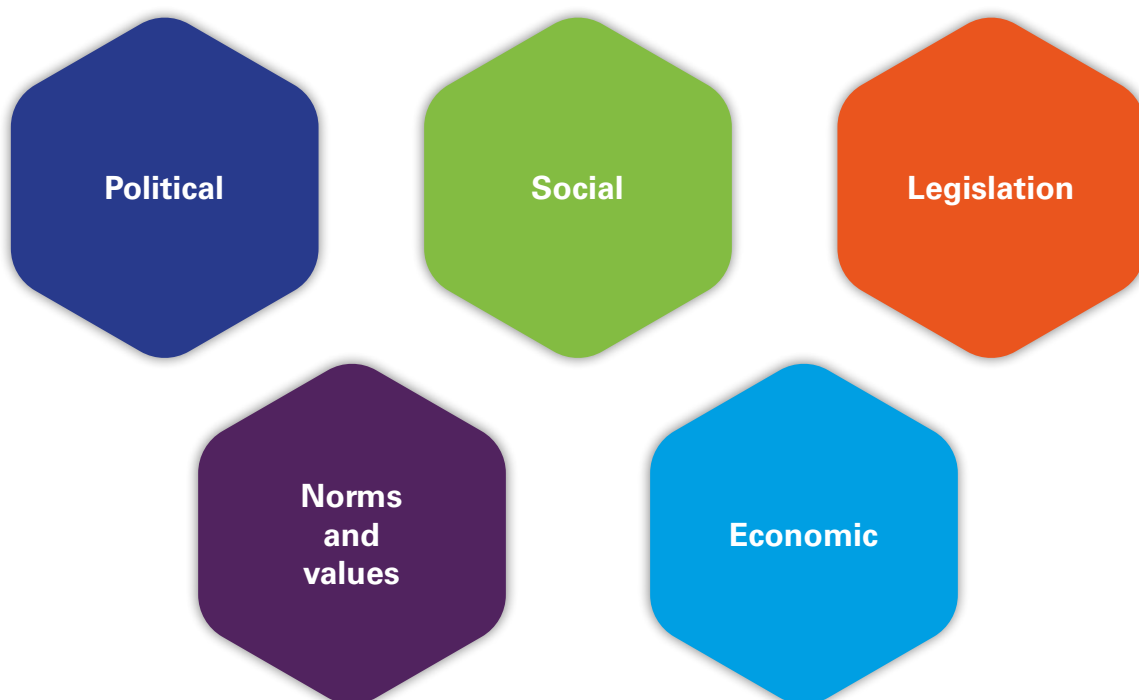
This Situation Analysis is the product of a wide-reaching consultative process that maximizes ownership across government, partner organizations and civil society. Specifically, a group consultation with ten Ministries and two Independent Authorities took place after which the draft Situation Analysis document was shared for comments and observations, with Ministries positively responding. In addition, a two-day consultation with 32 NGOs active in the field of children's rights took place followed also by bilateral consultations with a number of NGOs specializing in specific areas. In order to consider the views of children and youth themselves on the realization of their rights and the issues of concern to them, a consultation with over 100 children and youth from 15 to 22 years old took place with particular focus on the participation of marginalized and vulnerable children.

UNICEF has jointly worked with the Government of Greece and notably the Ministry of Justice, alongside officials from across relevant Ministries, to develop the Situation Analysis. Two independent researchers worked in collaboration with the UNICEF Greece Country Office who led on strategic direction and oversight. A broad literature review of reports, evaluations, studies and research on children's rights in Greece was conducted. Primary weight was given to data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) as the national statistical service of Greece that develops, produces and disseminates official statistics in accordance with statistical principles.

The Situation Analysis draws evidence from existing available data by ELSTAT and relevant authorities when needed as well as available bibliographies and researches. This was supplemented by requests to government agencies for quantitative data. The analysis of the data and information were disaggregated to the extent possible by various characteristics of children as relevant to the context. When data or specific disaggregation was not available, this was reflected as a gap. In preparation of the casualty analysis, special attention has been given to the 2012 concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the 2012 Ombudsman's Parallel Report and Greece and EU indicators. All research inputs were subjected to a four-pronged analysis: causality and bottleneck analysis, role-pattern, capacity gaps, and gender analysis.

The analytical framework for this SitAN is rights based and it was informed by UNICEF HQ guidance for the New Generation of SitAns and adapted to the Greek context. It recognizes that reasons behind the fulfilment and nonfulfilment of children's rights are to be found within the life cycle of children and are influenced by the capacity (and gaps in the capacity) of a duty-bearer network. The SitAN also looks at specific thematic areas based on the New Generation of SitAns toolkit. These include, children on the move, Roma children, children with disabilities, violence against women and impact of COVID-19.

### Context and structural causes





**CHAPTER 2.**

**COUNTRY**

**OVERVIEW**

## 2. Country overview

### Demographic profile

Greece, a country with a total surface area of 132,049 km<sup>2</sup> is neighboured by Albania to the northwest, North Macedonia and Bulgaria to the north, and Turkey to the northeast. Otherwise surrounded by the sea (Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean), Greece has the 11<sup>th</sup> longest coastline in the world and 227 inhabited islands. Over two thirds of the population live in urban areas, with the two major cities being Athens (4 million population) and Thessaloniki (1 million population) and dense populations in Attika (34.9%) and Central Macedonia (17.4%) with the remaining 11 regions hosting between 1.9% and 6.7% of the population. The most populated islands of Greece (with populations over 100,000) are Crete, Evia, Rhodes and Kerkyra. The overwhelming majority of the population speaks Greek.

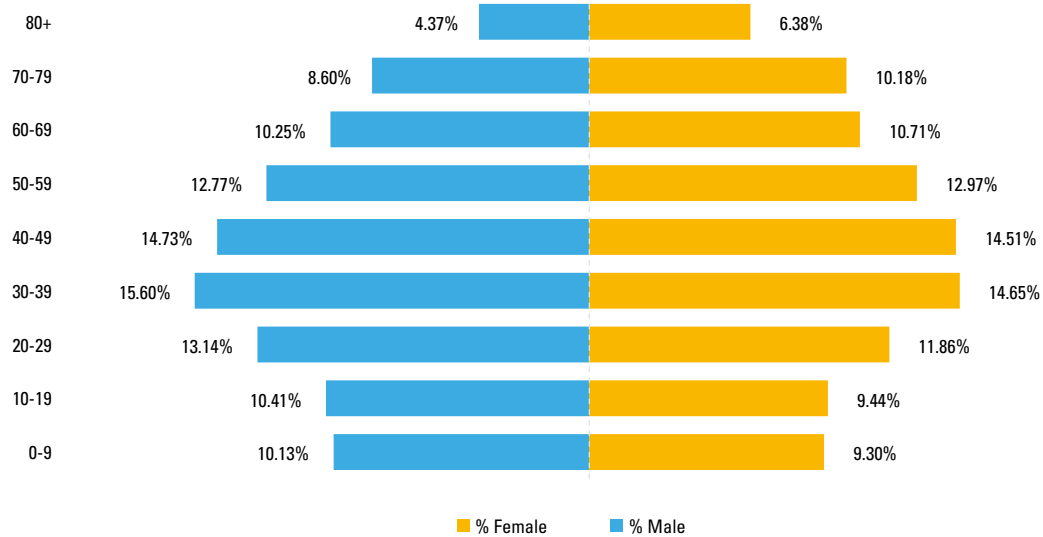
Greece plans to conduct a Population and Housing Census in 2021 as part of the wider European Union census, with results available in 2024. In this census for the first-time populations residing in Roma settlements and temporary reception and accommodation facilities for third country nationals or stateless persons will be included. The last census in Greece was conducted in 2011 and showed a total population of 10.81 million (51% female, 49% male),<sup>1</sup> of which 2 million are children with 14.3% aged 0-14 years old (of which 400,000 under the age of 5).<sup>2</sup> Based on current trends in both migration and fertility rates, the population projection by ELSTAT for 2050 is estimated to be (medium scenario) 11,499,614 people.<sup>3</sup>

Resident population by gender and age group 2011 Population – Housing census			
Age group	Total	Male	Female
0-9	1.049.839	537.220	512.619
10-19	1.072.705	552.173	520.532
20-29	1.350.868	696.744	654.124
30-39	1.635.304	827.542	807.762
40-49	1.581.095	781.112	799.983
50-59	1.391.854	677.018	714.836
60-69	1.134.045	543.421	590.624
70-79	1.017.242	456.247	560.995
80+	583.334	231.746	351.588
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.816.286</b>	<b>5.303.223</b>	<b>5.513.063</b>

Source: ELSTAT, 2011 census



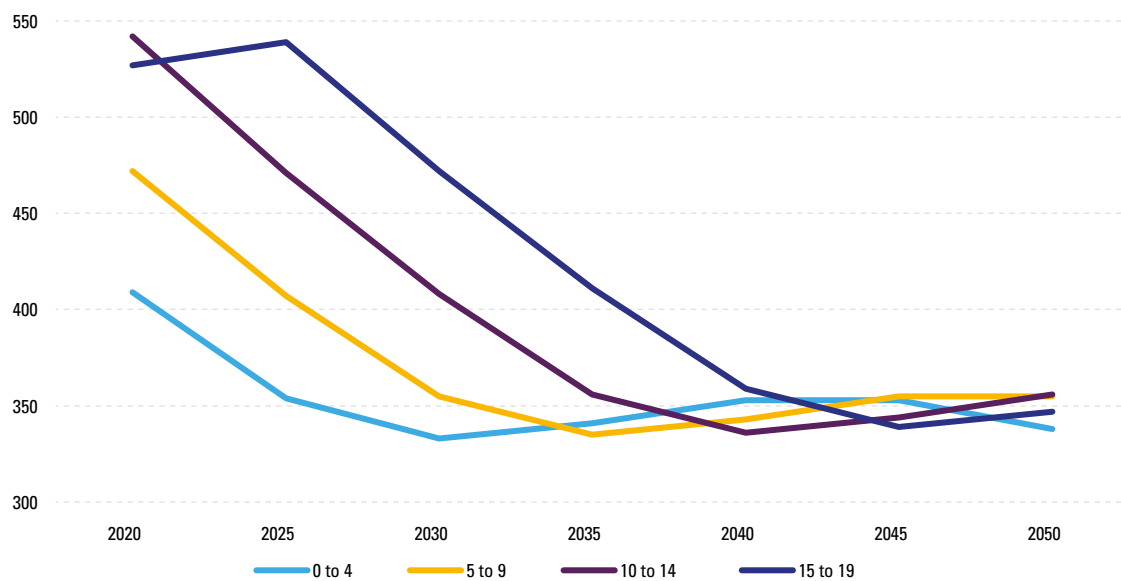
**Figure 1:**  
Share of age groups to the total population of the same sex



Source: ELSTAT 2011 census

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in 2018 was 1.4; a relatively stable number since 2012. The low birth rate creates an unequal margin in the birth to death ratio: Greece is facing one of the world’s strongest population declines which is expected to continue to decline in number until 2050, based on UN Population Division projections. This trend is further affected by the fact that 350,000 to 400,000 (predominantly young) adults have emigrated since 2010.<sup>4</sup>

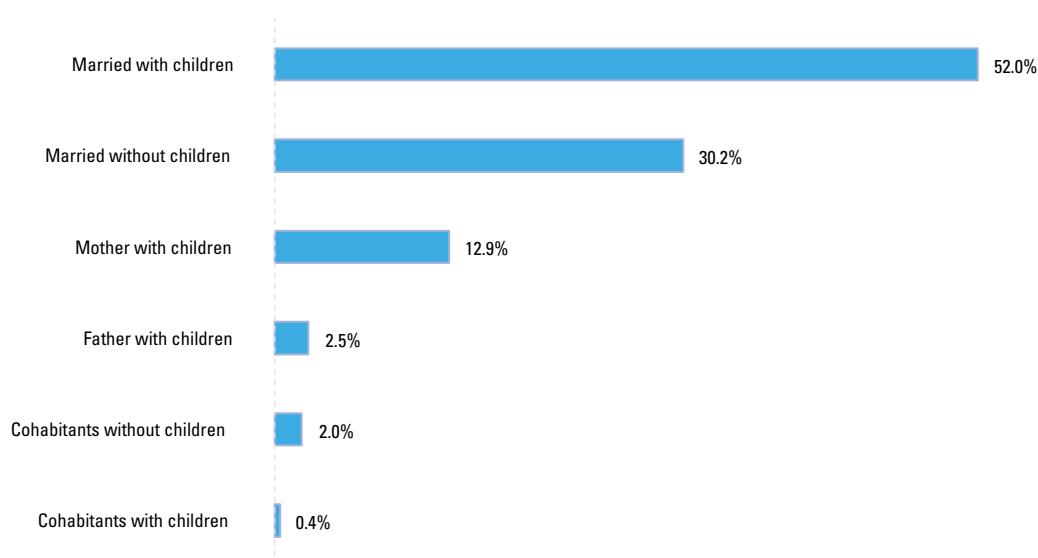
**Figure 2:**  
probabilistic population projections in age groups (2020-2050) (in thousands)



Source: UN Population Division

Life expectancy at birth for women in Greece is 84 years, lowered to 78.9 for men.<sup>5</sup> The proportion of the population aged 65 and older has risen to 20.68% while the proportion of those younger than 14 has declined slightly to below 14%. An aging population increases demands on health care and pension resources and can affect public funding for children. Marriage rates have slightly fallen whilst divorce rates have seen an increase, contributing to a generalized situation of smaller Greek households than previous years.<sup>6</sup> Based on ELSTAT 2011 census data, more than half (52%) of nuclear families were married couples with children; however, 15.4% were single headed families with children (12.9% were a mother with children while 2.5% a father with children) and 0.4% of nuclear families were cohabitants with children. Single headed families with children are of particular focus as usually they are more socially vulnerable.

**Figure 3:**  
**Nuclear families by type**



Source: ELSTAT 2011 census

In 2015, an increasing number of refugees and migrants began arriving in Greece with more than one million people arriving between early 2015 and March 2016; main countries of origin were Syria and Afghanistan. The EU relocation scheme, irregular movement, and returns (both based on the EU-Turkey Statement and voluntary) have resulted in a reduction of the current refugee and migrant population in Greece to 121,100 as at the end of September 2020, with 98,000 living on the mainland and 22,900 on the islands.<sup>7</sup>

The officially recognized minority in Greece, in accordance with the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, is the Muslim minority that resides in Thrace, Greece. The members of the Muslim Minority are Greek citizens; current unofficial estimates place the Muslim Minority Members at between 100,000 – 140,000 people (1- 1.4% of the total population). Relevant official population data is unknown owing to a lack of official ethno-linguistically or religiously disaggregated census data. The religious freedoms of the Muslim minority in Thrace are protected by law and enable Muslim minority pupils to attend either minority schools or the regular public schools, to be absent from school on religious holidays while Islamic religious education can be taught on an optional basis to Muslim minority pupils in two (2) Islamic education schools in Thrace.

## Roma population in Greece

The Roma have a long history in Greece dating back to the 15th Century. Traditionally nomadic tradesmen, Roma people today have adopted a more sedentary lifestyle and tend to differentiate themselves from nomadic Roma with the majority speaking the Romani language in addition to Greek. The majority are Orthodox Christians, but Roma in Western Thrace are Muslim. According to the Operational Plan for the Social Integration of Roma (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2017) the Roma population amounts to 104,210 persons across 76 settlements, 159 locations with mixed houses and settlements, and 119 impoverished neighbourhoods. The largest concentrations of Roma populations are around the larger cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Recent developments on responding to the needs of this population as well as ongoing barriers to upholding child rights for Roma children are discussed in the Thematic Chapter, titled “Roma in Greece”.

## Political economy and governance

Greece is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary democracy and legislative authority is grounded in a unicameral parliament. In July 2019, the New Democracy party formed a government headed by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in accordance with article 28, paragraph 1, of the Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Greece became an EU Member State in January 1981, joining the Schengen area in 2000, and is represented by 21 members in the European Parliament. Greece has held the European Council Presidency five times, most recently between January and June 2014. In 2018, the total EU spend in Greece was 4.870 billion euro, while the total Greek contribution to the EU budget was 1.488 billion.<sup>9</sup> Greece has been a member of NATO since 1952 and contributing to the reinforcement of the Alliance across its ‘southern flank.’

The Greek Constitution recognises Eastern Orthodoxy as the ‘prevailing religion’, however there are a number of varied religious practices also active in Greece (Catholic, Anglican, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Jewish, Bahai, the Church of Latter-day Saints). Greece is signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and freedom of thought, conscience and religion is also enshrined in law. The Greek government does not keep statistics on religious groups and national censuses do not require citizens to state their religion.

Greece was ranked 32 on the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), putting it in the High Development category with a score of 0.872 – adjusting for inequality HDI drops to 0.766, demonstrating disparities and inequalities in human development across the population in the areas of health, education and income. Gross National Income is \$24,909 per capita with a Gender Development Index (GDI) of 0.963: estimated income per capita for women is \$19,749 compared to \$30,262 for men.

Between 2009 and 2018, Greece was hit by a grave economic crisis that caused the economy to contract while the welfare state simultaneously declined under austerity measures. Financial shock permeated multiple layers of society, causing significant levels of unemployment, poverty and deprivation, affecting significantly children.

In 2019, the Gini coefficient<sup>10</sup> stood at 31 (a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality in the distribution of income), decreased from 34.5 in 2014 which was the maximum in the last 10 years; since then it is following a decreasing trend which indicates a slightly decreasing inequality each year in the distribution of income. The EU 28 Gini coefficient average stood at 30.7, almost in the same level with Greece.

## Humanitarian risk profile

Increased migration to Europe from Asia, Africa and the Middle East beginning in 2015 has changed the humanitarian landscape across Europe and notably Mediterranean countries such as Greece. Upon arrival in Greece, asylum seekers are moved to Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) during the completion of asylum procedures, which are characterized by limited movement through controlled entry and exit as well as poor living conditions. Concerns have been raised on a number of issues facing refugees and migrants, notably regarding those who are in detention, alongside additional allegations of *refoulement* of refugees and GBV against refugee women and children.<sup>11</sup> In particular, protective custody measures had raised a number of protection concerns when used for UASC until suitable care arrangements could be put in place. However, the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors introduced the abolishment of such protective custody practices by law and has developed a plan and standard procedure for referrals to alternative placement for unaccompanied and separated children in emergency accommodation facilities. Asylum seekers whose applications for asylum have been rejected are placed in pre-removal centres pending finalization of return procedures.

State services and structures were not designed to respond to the unprecedented refugee and migrant flows to Greece. As a result, UN agencies and a number of NGOs took over the operational response to the emerging humanitarian needs. The engagement of a number of non-state actors in the response brought up coordination issues including equal coverage of the humanitarian needs among different locations, with the State usually not being able to timely respond in leading the coordination required and in taking over operational aspects of the response. Despite the availability of resources, in most cases the response was inadequate resulting into serious humanitarian risks such as inadequate access to healthcare services, shelter and nutrition.

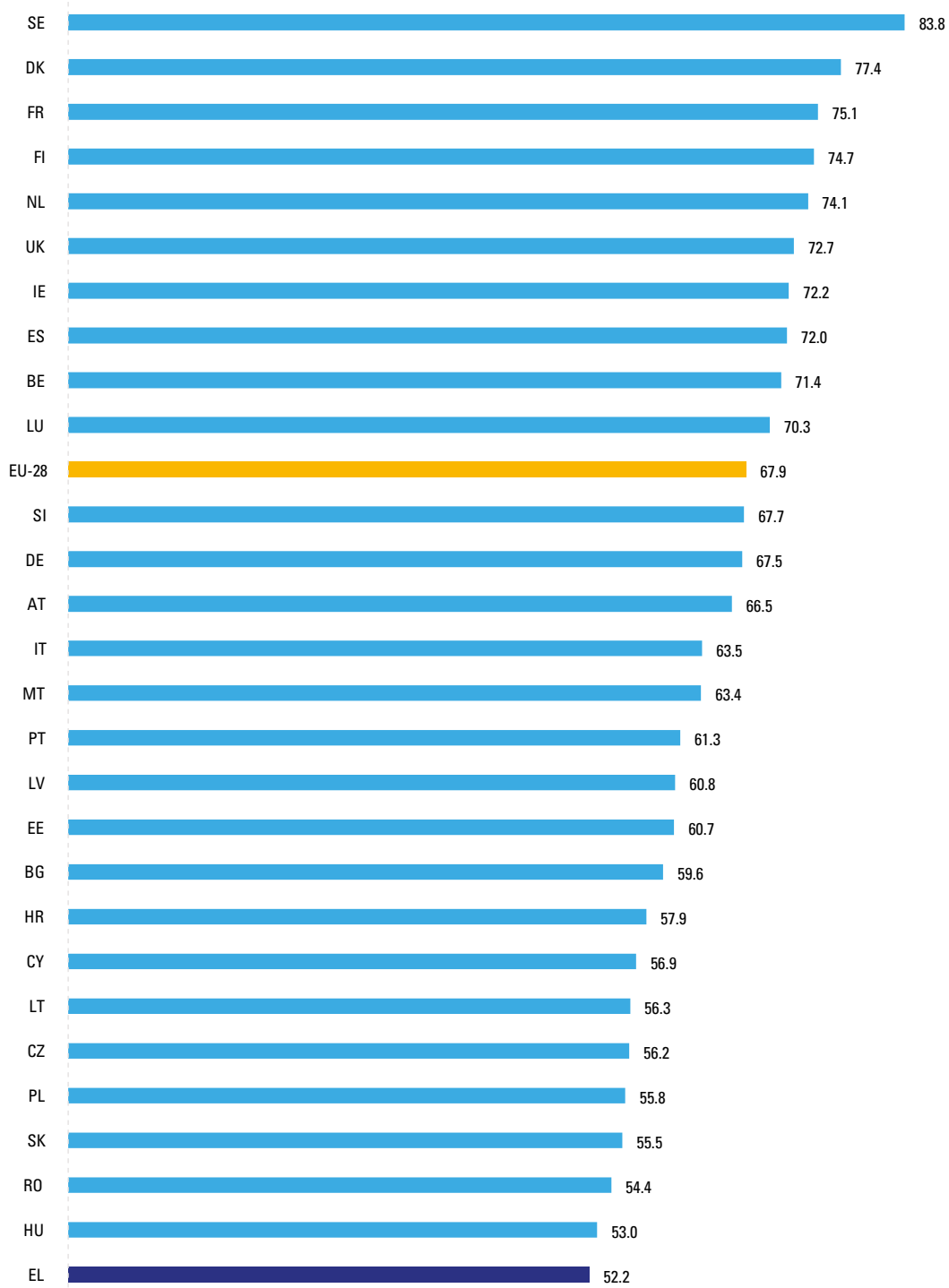
The beginning of 2020 also saw a brief spike in arrivals at the mainland crossing from Turkey into Greece resulting in large groups of refugees and migrants (including children and families) located at border areas which created increased humanitarian needs in specific geographic locations and overwhelmed frontline workers. On 1 March 2020, the Government of Greece decided to invoke 78.3 of the TFEU and suspend asylum applications which were re-instated at the end of May while the population pressure at the border was eased during the same period.

Recent developments on responding to the needs of this population as well as ongoing barriers to upholding child rights for refugee and migrant children are discussed in the Thematic Chapter, entitled “Children on the Move”.

## Gender profile

Legislation supporting equality between men and women is largely in place, enshrined within the Greek constitution. Greece has accepted and ratified declarations on human rights and international conventions aiming at improving the position of women in all sectors of economic, political, social and cultural life. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was signed by Greece at the United Nations on 2 March 1982. It was ratified and incorporated into domestic law on 30 April 1983.<sup>12</sup> Yet, despite a strong legislative framework, gender equality in Greece remains somewhat elusive. In 2008, Greece introduced a legislative quota of 33% representation by women in parliament, but at present there is only 18% representation, although the number of female ministers increased from 5% in 2005 to 19% in 2018.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 4:**  
**Gender Equality Index Scores (2020) (score out of 100 maximum points)**  
 (score out of 100 maximum points)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality

With 52.2 out of 100 points, Greece ranks last in the EU on the 2020 Gender Equality Index<sup>14</sup> with the EU 28 countries scoring on average 67.9 points. Its ranking has remained the same since 2010. The highest scores attained by Greece have been in health (including status and access) with 84 points and money (including financial resources and economic situation) with 72.5 points. The lowest rated domain remains that of power (including political, economic and social power) with 27 points in 2020 – while at the same time noting progress since 2010. Low scores were also evident in time (care and social activities) with 44.7 points, knowledge with 54.8 points and work (participation and quality, segregation) with 64.4 points, despite some progress achieved since 2010.

Entrenched social norms also hinder equality between men and women in Greece and the country retains its penultimate rank (52.2 out of 100) in the EU Gender Equality Index as a result.<sup>15</sup> Women take on more care activities and responsibilities than men, with 85% of women doing cooking and housework for at least one hour a day compared to only 16% of men. Greece maintains a ‘traditional’ model as it relates to division of labour between men and women, resulting in one of the lowest participation levels of women in the labour market in Europe.

In 2020, Greece had an employment rate of 55.2%<sup>16</sup> among the working age population with more women than men facing unemployment: the EU-defined 75% 2020 target of employment across both sexes has not been achieved<sup>17</sup>. That being said, more women (49.35%) successfully completed tertiary education in 2019 than men (36.7%)<sup>18</sup> but youth unemployment was 4% higher for women.<sup>19</sup> Greece has signed the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, establishing the practice of equal pay without discrimination to sex, however women earn 87 cents for every euro a man makes, resulting in a gender pay gap of 13%,<sup>20</sup> and are harder hit by unemployment, which hovers around 18% in Greece.

The uneven spread of men and women in different tertiary study fields continues to influence gender balance in particular sectors. 4% of women work in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) compared to 20% of men, while one in four women (23%) work in education, health and social work compared to 8% of men.<sup>21</sup> Parental leave is a marker of gender equality and in Greece large numbers of parents are ineligible for parental leave: 62% of women and 51% of men.<sup>22</sup> Ineligibility relates to unemployment, self-employment or inadequate periods of employment, but also relates to same-sex couples who account for roughly a third of employed parents.



**CHAPTER 3.**

**THE ENABLING  
ENVIRONMENT FOR  
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

## 3. The enabling environment for children's rights

### The global framework for children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the fundamental child rights treaty framing interventions and advocacy for children around the world and is the first global set of legally binding rights to apply to all children. It has been ratified by nearly every country on earth, making it the most widely ratified human rights agreement in history. In order to monitor its progress, a Committee on the Rights of the Child was established comprising of Independent Experts who examine reports from the various State Parties and address concerns and recommendations in the form of Concluding Observations.

The CRC is enshrined in Greek law (2101/1992) and according to the Greek Constitution, as with all international treaties, it "shall be an integral part of domestic Greek law and shall prevail over any contrary provision of the law"<sup>23</sup> Since ratifying the convention, Greece has submitted several reports, the most recent in December 2018, highlighting progress made by the country in the implementation of the CRC and last received guidance from the 2012 Concluding Observations that provided feedback and recommendations to further improve children's rights in the country.

The core principles outlined in the CRC – non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child – are also reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in European strategies and priorities at regional level. Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by world leaders in 2015, apply to all countries and to every citizen within them. The SDGs aim to ensure equity, with all people having the same safeguards and life opportunities within every country, rich or poor, by 2030.

As defined in the preamble of the UN Resolution on Agenda 2030, human rights for all is a defining characteristic of this agenda, resting on the values outlined in the Charter of the United Nations and various international human rights treaties. Agenda 2030 is universal in nature and correlates closely to the values upheld within the CRC. As such, both child rights and sustainable development goals are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing.

Greece, in its pursuit of equitable and sustainable growth, is strongly committed to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. To that end, the Government of Greece took part in an open dialogue with relevant stakeholders which resulted in the identification of specific Greek national priorities, encompassing the 17 SDGs and containing links to commitments within the CRC and building on the previous National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2002). The 8 priorities include:

- Fostering competitive, innovative and sustainable economic growth
- Promoting full employment and decent work for all
- Addressing poverty and social exclusion, and providing universal access to quality health care services
- Reducing social and regional inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all



- Providing high-quality and inclusive education
- Strengthening the protection and sustainable management of natural capital as a base for social prosperity and transition to a low-carbon economy
- Building effective, accountable and transparent institutions
- Enhancing open, participatory, democratic processes and promoting partnerships

The Voluntary National Review, published in 2018, highlighted progress made around key global goals. Yet, there is a need for sustained effort and holistic approach across State and non-State actors if the country is to succeed in delivering on this ambitious agenda.

## Child Rights in the European Union

Children's rights have been enshrined in the legal foundations of the EU, notably through the Lisbon Treaty (2009) giving the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (EUCFR) the same legal status as other EU treaties and obliging EU institutions and Member States to take children's rights into account when elaborating new policies. The EUCFR also contains detailed references to children's rights at the EU constitutional level, including through the recognition of the right of the child to receive free compulsory education, the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of age, and the prohibition of exploitative child labour.

The Treaty constituted a milestone in providing the legal basis for the EU's policy on child rights, both internally within its own frontiers and externally at a global level. It enabled the adoption of an EU law on combating child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and child pornography (2011), and in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011). The EU provides funding for programmes which aim to prevent and eradicate violence against children, young people and women.

Despite the volume of published guidance and policy, challenges persist in implementing and monitoring child rights consistently across EU Member States with varied legal systems and policies. For example, the Charter of Fundamental Rights only applies to Member States when they are implementing EU law. In this context and on the anniversary of the UNCRC (November 2019), the European Parliament called on the Commission to develop a new strategy to translate EU policy and political commitments to child rights into a set of concrete objectives necessary for achieving results for children.

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child was adopted in March 2021, and has as one of its main objectives to ensure the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues such as, migration, antidiscrimination, judicial training, LGBTIQ, and Roma, among others. The Strategy covers all seven priority areas of the Commission, including Participation in political and democratic life, Socio-economic inclusion, health and education, Combating violence against children and ensuring child protection, Child-friendly justice, Digital and information society, EU support, protection and empowerment of children globally, and Embedding a child perspective in all EU actions.<sup>24</sup> Many of these are already aligned with the national priorities of Greece as well as the recent National Reform Programme.<sup>25</sup>

The Strategy for Children's Rights will also support EU institutions and Member States to effectively plan and structure programmes to promote and protect children's rights for the future. It will build on the previously adopted EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child, which in turn recalls the standards and principles outlined in the UNCRC.

The EU also recognizes the pivotal role youth and adolescent participation can play in shaping their world. Based on essential engagement by youth themselves, the recent EU Youth Strategy provides a framework for policy cooperation around three core areas of action - engage, connect, empower – over the period 2019 to 2027.<sup>26</sup>

## Child rights in Greece

As one of the first signatories to the CRC, and based on its constitutional mandate to protect and safeguard children, Greece has made considerable efforts in developing action plans and strategies related to all four major areas of child rights: health and welfare, education, protection and civil rights, and freedom.

Greece has established a National Commission for Human Rights that reports directly to the Prime Minister and a National Mechanism for the Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans on Children's Rights,<sup>27</sup> coordinated by the General Secretary for Human Rights in the Ministry of Justice. The Deputy Ombudsperson for Children's Rights (under the Greek Ombudsman's office)<sup>28</sup> also monitors and intervenes around the implementation of child rights in the country.

Greece has recently strengthened the legislative framework for the provision of alternative care to children without parental care,<sup>29</sup> with special attention to the enhancement of foster care, and updated its guardianship system.<sup>30</sup> Greece also updated the legislative framework that ensured the right of all children to free public health care<sup>31</sup> and ratified the "Istanbul Convention."<sup>32</sup> From 2015 to 2018, Greece responded to the large influx of migrant and refugee children and set the legal framework for their integration into the public educational system with a series of legislative updates and policy adjustments.<sup>33</sup>

Within its broader vision towards childcare reform, the Government of Greece is in the final stages of drafting a National Strategy on De-institutionalization, spearheaded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). The strategy will develop a framework of social care that supports the full participation of all members of society, and focuses on empowering families and children by strengthening prevention mechanisms and support services, developing alternative care measures, moving towards family and community-based care while transforming existing institutions, promoting inclusive education for all children, and developing support programmes for children leaving care.

Additional steps to address the needs of marginalized or disadvantaged groups have been made through the National Operational Plan for the Social Integration of the "Roma" population (2017-2021). The plan is focused on key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing in geographical areas where there are concentrated numbers of the Roma population.

There are provisions within the Greek legal framework to specifically protect the rights of children with disabilities and Greece is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and many key principles of the CRPD have been incorporated into various Greek legal instruments. The Government of Greece is currently in the process of developing a National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to holistically address the needs of this population and provide targeted assistance, including for children.

Adolescents and young adults have become an increasing priority in the region and globally, with Greece being no exception. In 2017, the government launched a 10-year Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth which focuses on promoting young people's self-reliance, independence and

facilitation to adulthood; affordable and quality education; training and apprenticeship; decent work and development of youth entrepreneurship; and health, welfare and wellbeing. The Strategy aims to reinforce young people's participation in democratic life and to reduce inequalities among them.

It is noteworthy that plans are ongoing for several National Action Plans, including the National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child currently being developed by the Ministry of Justice, and National Strategic Plans are expected to inform future policy and action. Other important policy developments include the National Strategic Framework for Social Integration 2015–2020, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016–2020, and the National Action Plan for Prison Systems 2018–2020. In addition, the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors within the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) has developed a National Strategy for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, which aims to improve the situation of unaccompanied children in Greece and provide concrete responses to their needs while fully protecting their rights and safeguarding their best interests; this will be announced once relevant negotiations with the European Commission aiming to secure funding are concluded. In 2014, the National Action Plan for Human Rights was launched but its targeted period of implementation was not specified. A National Strategy for the Integration of Third Country nationals had been developed by the Ministry of Interior in 2013 (as a response to a request by the EU) as well as a National Strategy for Integration of Migrants and Refugees by the Ministry of Migration Policy in 2019; MoMA is currently in the process of Developing a new National Strategy for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees.

In Greece the institutional and legal framework for children's rights is, in general, considered adequate and in accordance with the provisions of UN treaties and different types of EU legislative and non-legislative acts (treaties, regulations, directives, recommendations, etc.). Some minor and very specific institutional and legislative gaps are emerging, but it seems that they are timely raised by both state and non-state actors and relevant legislative initiatives are taken. However, a serious issue that has not been adopted so far by the Greek State is the Child Impact Assessments which are used to predict the impact of any proposed law, policy or budgetary allocation which affects children and the enjoyment of their rights, as per the guidance of General Comment 5 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In addition, legal provisions concerning children rarely describe the mechanisms for their implementation resulting very often in a serious discrepancy between legal provisions and their effective and consistent implementation.

## Public finance

State spending on the social sector in Greece since CRC ratification has been generally below EU averages and Member State best practice. Coupled with the austerity measures imposed on Greece over the past decade, and despite serious efforts to address financing gaps in recent years, there has been a significant opportunity cost for children that has impacted progress caused by a chronically constrained fiscal environment. Between 2010 and 2016, total government expenditure fell by 24% and GDP by 20%.<sup>34</sup> The burden of the Greek public debt in September 2019 was 334.2 billion EUR, the second largest state debt in the world as it relates to GDP.<sup>35</sup> As such, and based on the assumption that there will not be the fiscal space for the state to expand meaningfully social sector spending, it will be necessary to identify new financing streams in favour of children in Greece that can be invested in the strengthening of the national systems that serve them.

The Partnership Agreement (PA) for the Development Framework 2014-2020 is the main strategic plan for growth in Greece with the contribution of significant resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).<sup>36</sup> The PA seeks to support Greece in reaching national targets within the Europe 2020 Strategy at the same tackling structural weaknesses that contributed to

the financial crisis, as well as economic and social problems caused by it.<sup>37</sup> The PA consists of 20 programmes (OP), of which 7 are sectoral and 13 regional.

### Health

Average expenditure on health was 7.72 % in 2018, contrasting with the EU average of 9.87%.<sup>38</sup> Public health expenditure in Greece underwent significant fiscal constraints during the economic crisis, the aftermath of which is still affecting the ability of the government to increase spending.

In 2017, Greece was investing 1,623 EUR per capita on health, more than one third below the EU average of 2,884 EUR.<sup>39</sup> There has been insufficient attention paid to, and investment in, the development of preventative policies and funding, with only 20 EUR per person per year against an EU average of 80 EUR per person.<sup>40</sup> 20% among Greece's poorest income quintile have unmet health care needs compared to only 3% of the richest households.<sup>41</sup>

### Education

In 2016, total government expenditure on education was less than 3% of GDP. While this percentage increases in 2020 to 3.9% of GDP, Greece still underperforms when compared to the EU average (4.6%).<sup>42</sup> In 2019, expenditure on educational institutions per student in Greece was ranked lower than both the OECD and European Union (EU) averages at primary and secondary level.<sup>43</sup>

Government education spending in Greece covers schools, universities and other public and private institutions, including instruction and ancillary services for students and their families. Primary, secondary and higher education are mainly financed directly from public resources, through the Ordinary Budget and EU co-funded programmes. Greece spends between 60-70% less per student in primary and secondary institutions than average OECD expenditure.<sup>44</sup> Despite education being free in Greece, an unusually high volume of private household spending is spent on private education or lessons. In 2012, Greek households spent 2,512.7 million EUR on education, which decreased by 14.7% during the economic crisis period until 2016.<sup>45</sup>

In 2018, the compulsory age of education was lowered to 4 years old, promoting children's enrolment in kindergarten. In 2019, the Ministry of Education allocated 4.85 million EUR from the Public Investment Programme (PIP) budget to support 26 local authorities in building necessary infrastructure for kindergartens.<sup>46</sup>

Municipal nurseries (covering the 0-4 years age group) receive funding from the Ministry of Interior through grants to a Local Government Body (LGB). European programmes also provide opportunities to authorities and municipalities for infrastructure funds including new construction or provision of equipment. In the school year 2018-2019, 234 million EUR was allocated (of which 167 million came from the PIP) to further develop facilities to increase free access to infant and child nurseries.<sup>47</sup>

Austerity measures during and after the economic crisis resulted in statutory teachers' salaries falling by almost 30% between 2005 and 2018.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the economic crisis affected the recruitment of new teachers with very low levels compared to OECD countries, as demonstrated by the age of teachers under 30 at lower secondary (1%), at upper secondary (0%) and at primary level (7%), compared to an OECD average of 13% and EU average of 10%.<sup>49</sup>

### Social protection

In 2018, Greece social protection expenditure was a total of 2,591 billion EUR, 19.2% of GDP and in line with the EU average.<sup>50</sup> This ratio increased during 2010-2016 (from 20.4% of GDP in 2005 to 26.6% in 2016)<sup>51</sup>, however in reality due to the decrease in Greek GDP during the same period the

actual increase is not clear. In comparison, only 1.4% of GDP is used for family and child benefits, including transfers in cash or kind, made to households to alleviate risks and respond to identified social needs.<sup>52</sup> Simultaneously, the share of social contributions has declined during the same period, a knock-on effect of the economic crisis that caused an overall reduction in employment and salary rates.<sup>53</sup> In line with the country's demographic changes, there has been a marked increase in social protection contributions to old-age benefits; Greece is second only to Italy in its old-age benefits' expenditure<sup>54</sup>.

On average in the EU-27 in 2017, expenditure on family and children benefits was equivalent to 8.6% of all expenditure on social benefits,<sup>55</sup> which is a rise in real terms of 40.6% between 2000 and 2017.<sup>56</sup>

Major reforms in social protection in Greece include nationwide health insurance alongside policy efforts to improve social transfers and target those most at need of support. There has been a powerful redistributive measure through concentrated expenditure on social welfare that has sought to enable those who were most vulnerable during the economic crisis to access a better standard of living. Ensuring fair contributions to social protection financing is challenged by lack of effective control mechanisms in a system based on social insurance contributions receipts: undeclared work and high levels of social insurance rates act as a disincentive to engage in formal employment and negatively affect financing.<sup>57</sup>

## Poverty and deprivation

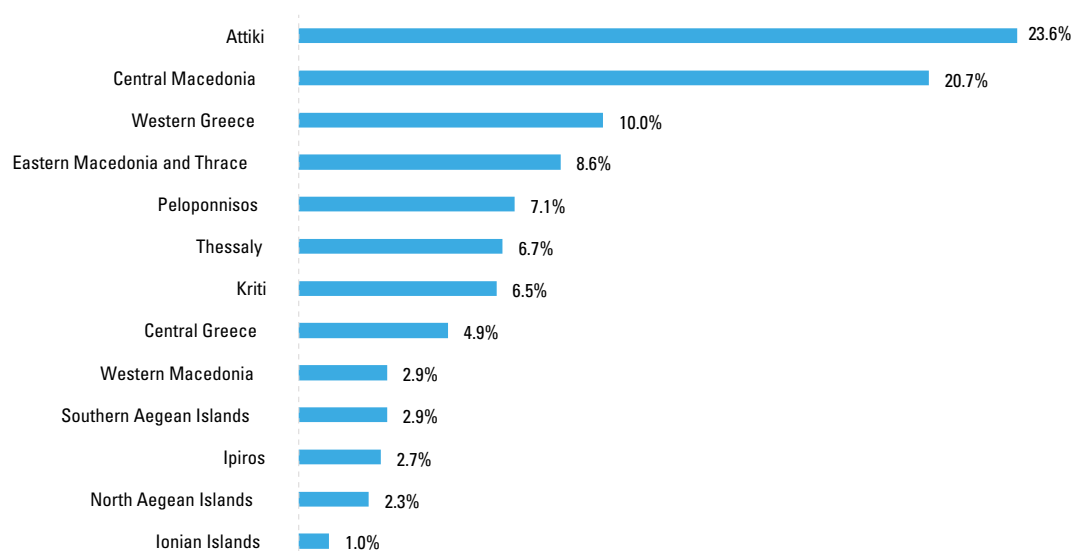
Poverty poses a significant risk of social exclusion for children, especially those from marginalized groups while persistent poverty impedes children's development. In addition, the circuitous nature of poverty leads to poor health and nutrition outcomes, including higher obesity rates.

Owing largely to a decade of economic crisis, very high levels of unemployment and austerity measures, Greece has not been able to meet the 'Europe 2020' goal of reducing child poverty by 450,000 people.<sup>58</sup> In 2010, 27.7% of the total population in Greece was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, rising to its highest level of 36% in 2014 before beginning to fall again to a consistent level of around 30%.<sup>59</sup> These statistics do not capture the rate of extreme poverty, which is measured as the monthly cost of a 'basket of products and services' without which a Greek household cannot survive. At the height of the crisis in 2015, 15% of the population faced extreme poverty.<sup>60</sup>

To tackle this increase, the Greek government launched a number of programmes to reallocate resources and distribute financial assistance, including through a Guaranteed Minimum Income since 2017 which is complemented by a set of services<sup>61</sup>, the Food and Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme (funded by the EU Fund for the Most Deprived of Food Aid), the Child Allowance, and the Housing Allowance alongside a range of benefits related to the elderly and for people with disabilities. All these efforts respond to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 that calls for an end to poverty in all its manifestations by 2030 and specifically to the target 1.3 on implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems. This set of policy initiatives is integrated in the framework of the National Priority for "Addressing poverty and social exclusion, and providing universal access to quality health care services" as part of the eight SDGs National Priorities outlined in the Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>62</sup>

Despite a slight improvement since 2017, children in Greece remain the demographic most likely to be poor. In 2018, one in three Greek children were poor or at risk of poverty or social exclusion, ranking Greece 25th among the EU-27. During 2019, a slight improvement was observed but the number remains high with 21.1% of children aged 0-17 years old at risk of poverty after social transfers.<sup>63</sup> It is important to highlight the differences among Regions; it is observed that child poverty affects more than 1 in 5 children in Attika and Central Macedonia Regions where approximately half of the country's total child population resides while the child poverty rates in the rest Regions are almost half the rates of these two Regions.

**Figure 5:**  
**Percentage of children (0-17) at risk of poverty by Region (2019)**



Source: ELSTAT

The main factors affecting child poverty or social exclusion (after taking into account the effect of social transfers) are household demographics (notably single parent families) and the labour market situation of the child's parents (partially linked to education).<sup>64</sup> Particularly vulnerable households are those facing unemployment with an at-risk-of poverty rate among 24.6% of the population,<sup>65</sup> while at risk of in-work poverty (IWP) amounts to 9.4%.<sup>66</sup> Data also shows that in-work poverty is greater among households with dependent children than those households without children.<sup>67</sup> However, the findings above mainly concern the mainstream population; specific groups of vulnerable populations and their children are believed to be living in a prolonged state of poverty, notably Roma, migrants and refugees, without being able to easily get away from this situation. However, no consistent and updated data exist on the poverty rates of these groups. Another interesting finding is that rural areas in Greece seem to be retaining a much higher poverty rate compared to cities; between 2010 and 2019 rural areas had on average a 44% higher poverty rate compared to cities while in EU countries rural areas had on average 21% higher poverty rate compared to cities.<sup>68</sup>

Persons who have completed only primary or lower secondary education are much more likely (22.7%) to be at risk of poverty than those who complete upper secondary or tertiary education (7.7%).<sup>69</sup> Non Greek citizens are far more likely to become affected by poverty or the risk of social exclusion than Greek citizens, with those most affected having nationalities of non-European countries.<sup>70</sup>

Long-term and sustainable measures are required to address child poverty, with efforts not dependent on short-term funding but rather strategic and durable investment. This was emphasized by the European Commission which stated that in 2014 there was an absence of an overall national strategic framework for tackling child poverty and exclusion and for promoting children's wellbeing.<sup>71</sup>

## Stakeholders

### Government

Greece has always been a firm supporter of children's rights and committed to ensuring that all children have equal opportunities and maintains overall responsibility for implementation of the CRC in the country. While past and present efforts to create and operationalize national policies have been significant, the absence of a definitive child rights strategy in Greece, and the lack of clear governance and accountabilities for child rights at central, regional and municipal levels, remain an obstacle to its full implementation.

The Government of Greece, as the main duty bearer assuring children have every opportunity to fulfil their potential in life, sets policy and acts to improve the lives of children through evidence-based planning. The Greek State has an updated and comprehensive legislative framework; however, a single, central, coordinating structure on child rights is needed to secure continuity in child rights management across subsequent governments (policy and budget planning, budget allocation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). There are current initiatives under the Ministry of Justice that could be further explored and act as an international example in this area.

### Local and regional authorities

At the local level, the role of regional and municipal outreach and action is vital in order to build communities that nurture a child's development. The 332 municipalities and 13 regions of Greece shape, plan and implement policies locally aimed at supporting social cohesion and sustainable development, taking into consideration national and European policies as well as the SDGs. There is an increasing focus in Greece on empowering local government and decentralizing decision-making, in line with national priorities, while ensuring financial autonomy.

The UNICEF Child Friendly Cities approach, already initiated in the Municipality of Athens, is one of the tools that could be applied by subnational actors to increase focus on realizing children's rights. This partnership framework aims to strengthen key elements of the CRC so that all children, including the most vulnerable can benefit from quality services that ensure their protection, care and well-being as well as promote their resilience and integration.

### Civil society

The Greek Constitution fully guarantees basic rights and freedoms (including the right to freedom of speech and the right to congregate, associate and submit petitions), and no major political or legal factors exist to inhibit the development of civil society. Today, there is no official registry of Greek NGOs and estimates of the number vary significantly. The mid-2000s saw 'The Campaign of 800 NGOs' whose activism sought to provide constitutional guarantees to the work of 800 NGOs,<sup>72</sup> whilst the Greek Centre for the Promotion of Voluntarism claims to have counted 1,800 active NGOs in 25 different sectors.

Prior to the economic crisis, organized civil society in Greece was weak and underdeveloped in relation to most other European countries. Towards the end of the twentieth century, there has

been an increase in civil engagement initiatives and activities, however this did not reflect significant changes in social norms but was, rather, linked to EU funding for CSOs and to mobilization tactics of political parties to the left.<sup>73</sup> Overall, marginalized groups were less likely to participate and the organizations were primarily based in urban areas.

In 2005, the CIVICUS Survey concluded that civil society in Greece was weak and that the state, political parties and the family were the country's strongest institutions. Based on a scoring of four key elements of civil society – structure, environment, values and impact – Greece was found to have an overall small size civil society highlighting a relatively underdeveloped civil society with a weak structure and limited impact, although the enabling environment was more positive. Large, institutionalized organizations were few and often linked to central government or major political parties, including patronage-based funding by Greek ministries.<sup>74</sup> A number of social norms have been related to the slow development of civil society in Greece, including noted apathy among Greek citizens (itself a characteristic of post-authoritarian Greek democracy), marked by a lack of time and investment by individuals, and the strong familial bonds prevalent in society, which dampened chances of trusting non-relatives.<sup>75</sup>

Four key issues have served to activate civil society in the last decade: increased migrant and refugee flows, increased sensitivity among Greek society about environmental degradation, increased awareness of mismanagement of public funds leading to a fight against corruption, and generalized economic downturn during the economic crisis affecting Greece's poorest citizens and leading to small scale solidarity initiatives which increased into civil society mobilization.<sup>76</sup> The economic crisis saw the birth of new initiatives (whilst older ones were undermined owing to a change in priorities and a reduction in state support), resulting in an eruption of social solidarity groups: a new revitalized civil society began to open up as communities and loose circles of friends began to come together for public benefit.

### **Private sector**

The growing interest in corporate social responsibility and the SDGs presents an opportunity to build strategic partnerships with the private sector in Greece on child-related issues. A results-based national programme with clear deliverables would enable broad engagement across industries to mobilize financial and in-kind support for children. Business can also act as an important springboard for social progress.

The 2030 Agenda calls upon all businesses, whether micro-enterprises, cooperatives or multinationals, to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. At the same time, the SDGs present significant opportunities for the private sector to open up new market opportunities and attract new private investments in sustainable development by leveraging companies' core competencies, expertise and resources.

In Greece, the representative bodies of both big companies and small & medium-sized enterprises support the 2030 Agenda and make efforts to be consistent with the SDGs, including goals directly relevant to children. For example, the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) and the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece (FING) acknowledge the 2030 Agenda as the opportunity for a sustainable future and promote the SDGs as an overarching framework to shape, steer, communicate and report on business strategies, goals and activities. The latest SBA report shows that SMEs constitute the vast majority of businesses in Greece (99.9% of all enterprises), and they generate three quarters of added value and 86.9% of employment of the business activity in the country.



A constructive and open dialogue, led by the Government of Greece, between all stakeholders would facilitate alignment of policies, prioritize national targets and build alliances with all sectors, in order to maximise results for children.

### **Academia**

In Greece, university and research institutes and centres have been intensively working on sustainability issues and the promotion of SDGs, mainly achieved through the development of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research projects, the organization of thematic workshops, conferences and other scientific events, and the implementation of education and training programmes addressing all dimensions of sustainable development. These institutes and centres focus their research on a wide spectrum of scientific fields falling within the scope of SDGs, including prominently humanities and social sciences, biosciences and health, natural sciences, engineering and technology sciences, environment and energy, and information and communication technologies.

Within this context, academic institutions play a critical role in supporting the government to promote evidence based planning and programming for children. Actors such as universities, think tanks, and research centres can harness the power of evidence generation to increase innovation and promote national efforts for children. Already, solid partnerships for children exist with several Greek universities in the context of teacher training and inclusive education and there is significant space to expand domestically and internationally.



**CHAPTER 4.**

**THE RIGHTS OF**

**CHILDREN**

## 4. The rights of children

### Right to health and welfare



The economic crisis resulted in stringent austerity measures as seen by a 4 billion EUR decrease in public health expenditure between 2009 and 2012. During this period, 2.5 million citizens lost their social health insurance (SHI) rights<sup>77</sup> and as the welfare state declined and the economy contracted, high out of pocket (OOP) costs (more than one-third of all health spending) led to further inequity around health care delivery. The European Commission remarked that 'in general, countries that have a high share of out of pocket spending also have a higher proportion of the population facing catastrophic out of pocket payments for health services, particularly among low-income groups.'<sup>78</sup>

The economic crisis had a marked impact on health outcomes, including on mental health: the prevalence of severe depression across the population increased from 3.3% in 2008 to 12.3% in 2013.<sup>79</sup> The economic crisis also negatively affected preventative health care. Child health outcomes were affected in multiple ways, including, for example, a negative effect on perinatal outcomes.

A range of measures have been put in place to enhance governance of the national health system, notably through improved monitoring and greater transparency in financial transactions within the system.<sup>80</sup> In 2016, law 4368/2016 launched the establishment of Community Centres, managed at municipal level, with prioritization for families at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, Roma, and migrants, among others. During service delivery, the same law reinforces that all recipients of health services have equal rights (article 33) and maintain their human and civil rights while receiving health services (article 59). The law also established a Committee for Ensuring the Rights of Receivers of Health Services. The same law stipulates regulations on working hours for parents whose circumstances, including parenting disabled children, have rendered them eligible for social insurance.

The National Action Plan for Public Health (2019-2022) by the Ministry of Health discusses child obesity, social inequalities and access to services, vaccination of children and adolescents (including migrant and refugee children). It also makes reference to the new Child Health Booklet, legislation on the promotion of breastfeeding, and health education programmes in schools. In 2020, a National Law on Prevention, Protection and Promotion of Public Health, established the 'Spyros Doksiadis' National Prevention Programme. It details the development of public health services for all citizens, including children, and defines departmental responsibility within the Ministry of Health for implementation. Article 3 foresees the development of a National Action Plan for Public Health. It also foresees the development of Special Action Plans for Public Health referring to regional specificities, specific vulnerable groups, and specific diseases (e.g. HIV).

#### Overview of the National Health System (ESY)

The National Health System (ESY) aims to ensure free and equitable access to quality health services and has undertaken a number of significant health system reforms since the economic crisis. Coverage and access, health care provision, quality and safety of health care, human resources for health, the role of patients and governance have all undergone reform.<sup>81</sup> One of the key results of the post-crisis reforms has been the introduction of the National Organization for Healthcare Provision (EOPYY) health insurance fund, alongside Law 4486/2017, which set the groundwork for

a new Primary Health Care system in line with WHO principles. The EOPYY, under the Ministry of Health, is designed to provide more standardised and equitable health care coverage and services.

Structurally, the system is made up of a mix of public and private health care providers, which are broadly divided into primary, secondary and tertiary tiers of service delivery. Primary health care under ESY includes rural health centres and surgeries as well as public hospital outpatient departments. Other public primary health care is provided through health centres operated by social insurance funds, local authorities and municipalities. Greek hospitals are categorised as either general (providing a range or multi-speciality departments) or specialised (providing one single speciality service). Private healthcare is also extensive in Greece and includes physicians who are under contract with one or more insurance funds, or private hospital outpatient departments. There are a large number of pharmacies in Greece, with many people referring to pharmacists for their medical knowledge as well as drug dispensing services.

### Health care in Greece

Moreover, public healthcare infrastructure is lacking and services for children are still not widely available across the country, especially for children with disabilities and also including those with mental health problems. In addition, patients with chronic illnesses also face limitations in access to healthcare services in Greece. For example, no oncology services (either public or private) are provided in rural areas, and consequently those with cancer face severe waiting times in hospitals in metropolitan and urban areas, where such services are concentrated.

Despite consistent efforts to improve health care for all in Greece, not all barriers to full and equitable access have been removed. Quality of care in remote areas and nationwide coverage of sufficient primary health care is not fully available with inequalities remaining in health (e.g. social status). Across Greece, physical and human health resources are distributed unevenly and are coupled with weak mechanisms for resource allocation as well as ineffective needs assessment and investment strategies.<sup>82</sup> According to the European Social Policy Network (ESPN), “there is an imbalance in healthcare service provision due to the geographically uneven development of healthcare infrastructure and services, with the majority of healthcare providers (both public and private, including doctors) located in the urban areas of the country (mainly Athens and Thessaloniki). This is particularly the case with regard to children, for whom public healthcare infrastructure and services are still not widely available across the country, while healthcare services for certain illnesses/diseases (e.g. cancer) are missing altogether in rural areas.” 3% of people living in cities are not able to access care owing to transport or distance, compared to 13% in rural areas. Many islands have benefited from the 2016 National Telemedicine Network, which links 30 health centers with 12 hospitals in the capital region, enabling diagnosis and specialist care to these populations.<sup>83</sup> While regional authorities are expected to participate in coordinating primary care, a planning mechanism for adequate allocation and sufficient resources is not in place.

There is an absence of national quality management infrastructure and use of indicators to monitor hospital performance (although clinical guidelines have been introduced). There is limited data collection suitable for international comparison on key indicators relating to the health profile of the Greek population. For example, there is an absence of a nation-wide cancer registry, which results in missing data on adult survival rates. Coordination was traditionally weak but is set to improve with multidisciplinary teams at local level, adequate referral systems and common electronic medical records.

The economic crisis played a negative role in the quantity of health care staff. Between 2009 and 2014, there was a 15% decrease in staff employed in hospitals. While Greece has the highest EU ratio of doctors to patients, there is a general lack of GPs, with only one in 16 doctors practicing as

GPs (EU average is 1 in 4), which results in just one GP for over 2,000 citizens (0.4 GP per 1,000 inhabitants).<sup>84</sup> There has been a marked 'brain drain' of doctors to other EU countries as government imposed freezing hires. These have now been lifted and Greece is endeavoring to hire 10,000 more health professionals<sup>85</sup> within the period 2019-2023. Constraints to the full implementation of this policy, and the knock-on effect to delivery of quality of services across the country, include the length of time needed to train up qualified staff, and the funding required being available. Doctors employed in the private sector will need to see benefits of moving to the EOPYY sector.

10% of the population has reported unmet medical needs (medical examinations or treatment due to costs, distance and travel, or extended waiting times) the vast majority of who are low-income families (20% versus 3% in high-income brackets). Greece therefore has the second highest level of unmet medical needs, which is directly related to it also having the largest income inequality gaps in the EU.<sup>86</sup> Although there has been a decrease in unmet needs during recent years, socioeconomic factors relating to medical health care inequalities remain stark. Cost is the main barrier preventing access to health services in Greece. The country has one of the highest EU rates of private household expenditure on health to cover out-of-pocket (OOP) costs, with the level of OOPs in Greece double that of the EU average (35% versus 16%).<sup>87</sup>

Pharmaceutical costs and inpatient care are the largest causes of OOPs, alongside hospital and dental services. The cost of health care is one of the main access barriers to people with low incomes, and significant concerns remain around equitable access to health care given more than 25% of OOP payments are the result of informal payments, which poses major risks to access, financial protection and equity.<sup>88</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) found that poorer people and those living in rural areas make the bulk of OOP payments with 10% of households experiencing catastrophic spending, mainly affecting the poorest households. Efforts have been made to increase oversight in order to increase transparency of the health system; for example, the introduction of an e-system for doctors' prescriptions in 2012 further improved by a 2014 introduction of prescribing budgets for doctors has helped promote anticorruption practices with both systems contributing to improved monitoring of prescribing and dispensing practices.<sup>89</sup>

Nationwide inequalities in life expectancy are related to socioeconomic status, notably among men; men with a higher level of education (tertiary) can expect to live six years more than those with the lowest level of education.<sup>90</sup> These figures are primarily the result of poorer lifestyle choices among men with a lower level of education, and include factors such as smoking or obesity. Women also face poorer health outcomes based on their socioeconomic status, but to a lesser extent (with a 2.4 year difference). Nine out of ten women with tertiary education are screened for breast cancer, compared to six out of ten among women who have not completed secondary education. The higher prevalence of risk factors among socially disadvantaged groups contributes to inequalities in health and life expectancy.<sup>91</sup>

Emergency cases for all vulnerable groups are admitted to the hospitals without preconditions but free access to regular public healthcare services is provided when individuals possess (or acquire, if they do not already have one) a Social Security Number (AMKA), or PAYPA for asylum seekers. While those who are insured have access to private providers contracted with EOPYY on a cost-sharing basis and public health care, uninsured persons (AMKA and KYPA/PAYPA holders) are not entitled to such private cost-shared access to healthcare.

*“Sickness or disability should not determine who you are”*

## Maternal and child health

The economic crisis had a negative effect on perinatal outcomes. Poor economic situations and high unemployment are associated with increased infant mortality rate (IMR) and obstetric trauma, including low birth weight deliveries independent of the age and origin of the mother. Infant mortality rates increased nominally from 3.1 per 1000 live births in 2007-2009 to 3.5 in 2018, but overall remain low.<sup>92</sup> An increased rate of stillbirth amongst Greek women younger than 25 could be attributed to poor access to healthcare during the economic crisis, and unemployment.<sup>93</sup> However, an increase in stillbirth figures across all mothers (from 3.31 per 1000 live births in 2008 to 4.36 per 1000 in 2010<sup>94</sup>) can be attributed to increased maternal age. There is no data available on low birth weight, stunting or wasting or overweight among the under-five population.

The Infant Mortality Rate and Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) have steadily declined since the 1950s. The U5MR in Europe overall stood at 5.1 in 2019, compared to 3.8 in western Europe. The child mortality rate in Greece over the past 19 years was steadily declining until 2011, there was a small increase within the period 2012-2017, and then a decline was noted from 2018. The U5MR in Greece in 2019 was slightly lower than the overall European average (4.5), but higher than western European countries; in 2019, Greece ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> among the EU-27 countries).<sup>95</sup>

All new mothers receive a free Child Health Booklet,<sup>96</sup> in which vaccination and developmental stages of the child are noted. A mother's national insurance number provides her and the baby with free access to Mother-Child Care Units, run by the Ministry of Health, under the auspices of the Municipal and Regional Health Units.

Yet, early childhood development, a critical foundation to a child's physical and emotional development, is relatively low in Greece. Ensuring equal early childhood development opportunities can help offset a number of inequalities and inequities as well as provide multiple benefits to the children themselves.<sup>97</sup> 67.6% of children aged 0-3 years did not receive formal childcare while only 14% received formal childcare for 30 hours or more per week in 2019.<sup>98</sup>

There is an extremely limited number of nursery places available owing to insufficient and fragmented implementation of funding. Municipalities, under the oversight of the Ministry of Interior, are responsible for managing public nurseries (2 months – 4 years old) or Child Centres (2.5-4 years old) through the allocation of specific grants. There are also a number of private nurseries overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The allocation of places and priority criteria exist to enrol families most in need, including children of working parents, children of unemployed or disadvantaged parents, or children in need of particular care (from a single parent household, separated parents, or a special needs parent).<sup>99</sup>

Despite this priority allocation, in 2019 17% of households reported unmet needs for formal childcare in Greece, with single mothers most at need of greater support.<sup>100</sup> As the number of dual-earning and single-parent families grows, childcare service becomes even more essential.<sup>101</sup> Affordable childcare for under 3-year-olds is scarce in Greece, which results in declining participation and a heavy reliance on informal child-minding.<sup>102</sup> Unmet childcare needs can result in families more likely to experience material deprivation as well as poverty and social exclusion.<sup>103</sup>

Children between the age of 3 and 4 (roughly 4 in every 5 children) are receiving some kind of formal childcare or education prior to entering compulsory kindergarten - nearly 30% of this age group receive over 30 hours of care per week, and 55% receive between 1 hour and 29 hours per week.<sup>104</sup> There is also a high rate of part time care in nurseries, notably for 3-year-olds.

The MoLSA, recognizing the need for improved access to childcare for infants, toddlers, and children up to 12 years old (including children and adolescents with disabilities) established

the “harmonization of family and professional life” programme. Families who benefit from this programme are provided with vouchers which can be used to enroll their children to a range of public and private childcare facilities. This year (2020-2021) mothers working in the public sector were included for the first time as beneficiaries of this programme. In 2017, joint Ministerial Decision (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) 41087/2017 defined the regulation of municipal nurseries’ operation. Moreover, in the same year another Ministerial Decision by MoLSA set a framework for the establishment of private nurseries.

## Nutrition

Childhood and adolescence are periods of enormous importance to individual development. Beyond the obvious human rights imperative to protect and promote the health of children and adolescents, an investment in these groups clearly links to the health as well as social and economic capital of the population for decades to come.<sup>105</sup> Children and adolescents require adequate vitamin, mineral and micronutrient intakes for growth and development.

Law 4316/2014, Article 3 includes measures for the promotion of breastfeeding. 94% of mothers breastfed their baby on their 1<sup>st</sup> day of life, 51% exclusively breastfed at the end of the first week, 40% at the end of the first month, 25% at end of the fourth month, and 0.8% at the end of the sixth month.<sup>106</sup> 45% of women were partially or exclusively breastfeeding at the end of the sixth month. Births by cesarean are associated with lower rates of breastfeeding and education and socio-economic status of the mother also influences breastfeeding choices made. There is insufficient support for breastfeeding engrained in hospitals at birth, when mothers require specialized support and information to help them commence breastfeeding. Where baby milk formula is provided, including among refugee and migrant populations, there is a lack of oversight on the quantity and quality of the formula and its correct usage by nutritional experts. Access and distribution of baby feeding requires control in order to ensure the correct delivery of milk formula, whilst encouraging breastfeeding wherever possible.

According to ELSTAT in 2017, the general health condition of people in Greece (including children from the age of 16 and up) was found to be very good for 45.2%, good for 29%, moderate for 15.5%, poor for 8% and very poor for 2.3%. The National Action for Children’s Health (EYZHN) is a program aiming to record health- and lifestyle-related parameters of the total student population of Greece.<sup>107</sup>

The Hellenic National Nutrition Survey (2020) found a large number of children and adolescents had insufficient intakes of numerous micronutrients including vitamins D, K and potassium was inadequate in practically all individuals while vitamin A, folate, calcium and magnesium were also insufficient, especially in girls aged 14–18 years. The report suggests that these results are caused by the fact that habitual dietary intake does not provide adequate sources of micronutrients and recommends that adolescents’ diet should be improved through a targeted effort by public health policy makers to influence food choices in Greece.<sup>108</sup>

According to Law 2817/2000 the Ministry of Health started providing educational material to teach children about nutrition and eating habits, with the subject taught by trained teachers from relevant university departments. The Ministry of Health reported (in 2013) that 97% of schools endeavored to provide Greek children with a Mediterranean diet, 94% intended to teach healthy habits and 88% intended to tackle obesity.<sup>109</sup> It is not clear to what extent school food policy objectives were met. Additional initiatives that would serve to match a determined effort to counter poor nutrition, including, for example, the banning of vending machines and restrictions on food and drink marketing on school premises nationwide has not been put in place. There is lack of data on national policies to reduce salt consumption and to limit saturated fatty acids and industrially produced trans-fat. Uptake

of these policies at household level is therefore not known. In 2019, the National Dietary Guidelines of Greece for Infants, Children and Adolescents were published. Disseminated across public schools in Greece, the guidelines provide food-based nutritional and physical activity recommendations.<sup>110</sup>

While genetic factors and perinatal factors play their role, additional contributing causes include the absence of physical exercise, insufficient sleep, increased screen time and low adherence to a Mediterranean diet.<sup>111</sup> With 37% of children overweight or obese, Greece ranks the highest amongst EU-27, with obesity affecting boys more than girls. Overweight and obese rates among children are about two times greater among those living in the lowest income families compared to those living in the highest income families

Being overweight or obese not only carries medical consequences but also affects the social and psychological lives of children. Beyond the obvious human rights imperative to protect and promote the health of children and adolescents, an investment in these groups clearly links to the health as well as social and economic capital of the population for decades to come,<sup>112</sup> as eating habits developed in childhood tend to continue into adulthood. Preventative health strategies are needed to decrease further obesity, and proactive public health initiatives to treat obesity related issues and the associated co-morbidities of cardiovascular illnesses, diabetes, metabolic syndrome and excess weight in adult life.

### Immunization

Children are vaccinated according to the National Vaccination Programme (NVP) managed by the National Vaccination Committee, and vaccines are free of charge and recorded in the Child Health Booklet. Coverage is provided free of charge to all legal residents, including asylum seekers. 99% of two year-old children have received Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis vaccines (compared to 94% across the EU) and 96% have received Hepatitis B.<sup>113</sup> Take-up of secondary booster vaccines across essential immunizations is, however, concerning; for example, 83% of children have a second MMR dose compared to 97% at first dose, which can lead to breaks in herd immunity.<sup>114</sup>

Although there are systematic vaccination programmes taking place especially among socially vulnerable groups such as refugee, migrant and Roma children, there is a lack of regular monitoring and reporting of vaccinations conducted throughout Greece. The lack of evidence results in data being sourced from small-scale surveys and not nationwide and publicly shared data. The lack of a national registry hampers both monitoring and reporting. Most evidence has been generated from small-scale surveys by institutes. EODY was providing periodically figures on refugee and migrant children vaccinated. In addition, the private sector lacks regulation resulting in lack of data as they are not obliged to report to state authorities on vaccines completed.

While there are satisfactory levels of vaccination across the country, there are concerns about Roma children accessing immunizations with reports of low vaccination coverage. In a 2017 study, it was found that about 80-90% of Roma children had had 'at least one vaccine dose'; 35-40% had 'minimum vaccination, around 30% 'basic vaccination' and around 15% 'extended vaccination'.<sup>115</sup> Children from settlements where there was a primary health care service rather than a hospital, were more likely to have a vaccination document and get at least one vaccine dose, however 'extended vaccination' rates remain low overall. Socioeconomic factors and structural barriers determine poor vaccination rates; conversely, better living conditions and primary health care services close to settlements are positively associated with higher vaccination rates. The absence of reliable estimates of Roma vaccination rates is a barrier to advocating for prioritisation of the measures to ensure vaccination and to promote it at household level.



In 2017-2018 3,000 people were reported with measles, mostly from the Roma population where coverage is generally lower.<sup>116</sup> Roma populations do not routinely have full access or timely access to sufficient information to complete their child's vaccination schedule, which can hinder their enrolment in school, where a vaccination certificate is required for enrolment.

### **Mental health**

There is a lack of specialised mental health services for children, while many geographical areas are lacking mental health services altogether. Over 1,000 15-19 year olds died of suicide across EU countries in 2017: boys are 2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than girls. Despite the relatively low absolute number of suicides among adolescents, suicide is one of the leading causes of death in this age group, and is more likely to be attempted if they have a family history of alcohol and drug abuse disorders, have access to firearms, and experience difficult life events at school or at home. The lowest rates are reported in Southern European countries (Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Italy and Spain).

*“Attention should be given to mental health in schools”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Ministerial Decision (FEK 2289/11.06.2019) states that all children have access to public mental health structures. The national law on the Organization and Function of Community Mental Health Centers for Children and Adolescents states that Mental Health Centers protect the rights of people with mental health problems, as foreseen in the UN Convention on the Rights for People with Disabilities (adopted under Law 4074/2012). Community Mental Health Centers are the key providers of prevention services, diagnosis and therapy, certification, allowances and collaboration with other state agencies and service providers. However, in reality, mental health services for children are seriously under-developed. Out of 54 assessed municipalities, 20 are without mental health services for children and adolescents, whilst the remaining are understaffed.<sup>117</sup> The majority of regions across Greece do not have mental health services for children. One NGO has remarked on the lack of any mental health services among Roma populations, and noted that the population does not normally turn to these types of services were they available. NGOs have made mention of two specialist shelters available in Athens and one in Thessaloniki (which provides places only for 5-6 adolescent girls). Mental health shelters and institutions for children are scarce (including emergency shelters).

The 'Psychargos' Programme (under the Ministry of Health) was a national strategy and operational plan to transform psychiatric care and to develop further community mental health services for children and adolescents. It defines specific priorities for the development of child psychiatry and provides community mental health services for vulnerable people (autism, dementia, incarcerated individuals with mental health disorders, individuals at risk of poverty, the unemployed and migrants). Reference is also made to the need for the prevention of mental health disorders, and awareness raising campaigns among children, including on bullying. The program was funded by the European Union at 75% of the budget for five years and came to an end in 2009.

Since that time, the economic crisis and associated austerity measures across the public health sector forced a significant cut in budgets (up to 50%), decreased the number of qualified health staff and mental health services were seriously scaled back or stopped altogether among both public and non-profit providers.<sup>118</sup> State funding for mental health decreased by 20% between 2010 and 2011, and decreased by a further 55% the year after.<sup>119</sup> The national budget for child and adolescent mental

health is incorporated into the overall mental health budget and therefore suffered imposed financial austerity measures across the board. Only three hospitals have some capacity for urgent and short-term hospitalization of children and adolescents with serious mental health disorders for the whole country; yet, the places in those hospitals are limited. There is not community-based care for children and adolescents with mental health issues, or for parents with mental health problems. Whilst there are wide ranging mental health needs across any population, there are particular concerns raised by INGOs at present on the mental health status of youth refugee and migrants, notably triggered by detention, lengthy periods of insecurity during the asylum process, absence of family members and familial support, lack of access to school or viable education opportunities. Withdrawal, self-harm, aggression and even suicide attempts are realities among this vulnerable population.<sup>120</sup>

### **Substance abuse**

The prevention of substance abuse is key to adolescents' health. 83% of adolescents have drunk alcohol at least once in their lifetime. Binge drinking among those 15-16 year olds has increased over the last two decades, affecting both boys and girls, but with a more rapid increase in total % of girl binge drinkers than boys. 47% have smoked at least once in their lifetime. One in every five children 15-16 years old in Greece were reported to have smoked in the month prior to an assessment undertaken in 2015; this figure has decreased in recent years and is lower than in many EU countries, however there is an extremely high prevalence of smoking among Greek adults. The European Report on Drugs (2017) collected data on drug use from across EU countries; 4% of students 15-16 years had made use at least once of psychotropic substances, and cannabis (last month incidence) use was 6% among girls and 9% among boys.

### **Online exploitation and bullying**

Eurostat data showed that four in five young people (80%) aged 16 to 24 years old in the European Union have basic or above basic digital skills, with Greece ranking even higher (92%). In the digital age, unsupervised online activity includes particular risks of online exploitation. One study presented at the Hellenic Conference on Secure Internet Browsing showed 18.2% of the children participating reported issues linked to Internet addiction while 4.2% reported having experienced cyber-bullying.<sup>121</sup> According to data by the Cyber Crime Division of the Hellenic Police, 6% of cases in 2018 concerned child pornography.<sup>122</sup>

Internet addiction in children is only treated systematically in one of the Children's Hospitals in Athens, while most of social welfare and mental health professionals have not received any information and guidelines on how to deal with cyber bullying. There have been only a limited and sporadic number of campaigns addressing the general public and especially parents on how to prevent cyber bullying. Child pornography still remains a problem solely addressed by Law Enforcement. A National Strategy for combating cyber bullying, including child pornography has not been developed, and it should as online abuse and exploitation is one of the most rapidly growing forms of violence against children.

Despite steps taken to combat bullying in school life, including the creation of the Observatory for the Prevention of Violence in Schools and Bullying, issues remain that are primarily related to ethnicity or race, learning difficulties and gender.<sup>123</sup> In 2014 the Ministry of Education<sup>124</sup> issued a circular on issues related to the prevention and management of bullying, training on the definition and behavioral expressions of bullying. However, implementation has been slow. Only a limited number of schools are supported by School Psychologists or School Counsellors and efforts to inform students about bullying have been fragmented. More broadly, the national curriculum has not yet included the topic of child rights across public schools. In June 2020, Ministerial Decision 79910/Δ4 established a Committee in the Ministry of Education to prevent, deter and deal with bullying.

A more recent study on bullying in Greece showed that despite steps taken to combat such experiences in school life, such as the creation of the Observatory for the Prevention of Violence in Schools and Bullying, issues remain and are primarily related to ethnicity/race, then to financial and social status, followed by learning difficulties and gender.<sup>125</sup> According to OECD, 27% of students reported being bullied at least a few times a month, compared to 23% on average across OECD countries.<sup>126</sup>

### **Environmental health**

A healthy environment is essential for the survival, wellbeing and development of children and is required for all children in order that full realization of the rights of the child can be met. 80% of the population lives in urban areas, where ambient air pollution is a growing threat to their health and wellbeing. Whilst air pollution emissions have reduced by 25% since 2005 in the EU, above 75% of people in European capitals are exposed to air pollution emissions above the WHO guidelines between 2016-2018.<sup>127</sup>

Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of air pollution, with noted effects on childhood respiratory conditions including pneumonia, bronchitis and asthma, and the disruption of physical and cognitive development. The European Environment Agency (EEA) 2020 report shows Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) pollutants affected 96.8% of the urban populations in Greece in 2017 (72.5% in 2016 and 96.9% in 2015). Air pollution also has considerable welfare and economic losses (premature death, loss of productivity and higher health spending).<sup>128</sup>

Air pollution across Europe has significant impact on health outcomes, particularly in poor urban areas, and is directly responsible for premature deaths across the region. Pregnant women face potential damage to their unborn child, including foetal loss, preterm delivery and lower birth weight. 8% of deaths in Greece, accounting for 9,800 people, each year may be attributed to pollution in the air, water, soil and workplace.<sup>129</sup> Air pollution was of particular concern during the economic crisis when levels of dangerous air pollution rose by up to 30% as households sought to economise on fuel costs following a fuel tax hike (of up to 450%), and turned to burning cheaper fuel, namely wood, as a result. So-called 'energy poverty' contributed to dangerous levels of toxic fumes over Greece's major cities.<sup>130</sup>

Greece has low levels of organization of solid waste management compared to western EU-states and continues to favour landfill over recycling. Hazardous waste treatment occurs at very low levels compared to European countries including Germany, Bulgaria, Estonia and France.<sup>131</sup> However, Greece is shifting towards the use of renewable energy, phasing out the use of lignite (brown coal) in power stations by 2028 and is also moving to ban single use plastics.<sup>132</sup> In addition, the government endorsed a National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030.<sup>133</sup>

### **Climate change and natural disasters**

There appears to be increasing awareness among Greeks of climate change. The destruction of forest and coastlines (often due to illegal construction) has become increasingly visible and wildfires have caused significant damage (including in 2007 in the Peloponnese, causing 71 deaths). There are approximately 300 environmental organizations in Greece, among which there are small voluntary organizations and annexes of larger international NGOs, including WWF and Greenpeace. Most are located in Athens or Thessaloniki, however, some are also based on small islands (for example, Zakynthos) and in mountainous areas such as Western Macedonia and Epirus.<sup>134</sup>

As a Mediterranean country with thousands of islands, Greece is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Extreme climate events like heat waves, droughts, floods and forest fires occur

regularly. For example, the intensity of heat waves in large urban centers such as Athens has worsened and the Greek forest fires in the summer of 2018 were among the deadliest worldwide.<sup>135</sup> To prevent adverse effects of climate change and achieve sustainable development, environmental governance has to be strengthened, climate mitigation and adaptation policies have to be developed and effectively implemented, and enhanced coherence between environmental, energy, transport, agricultural and tourism policies should be planned and achieved<sup>136</sup>.

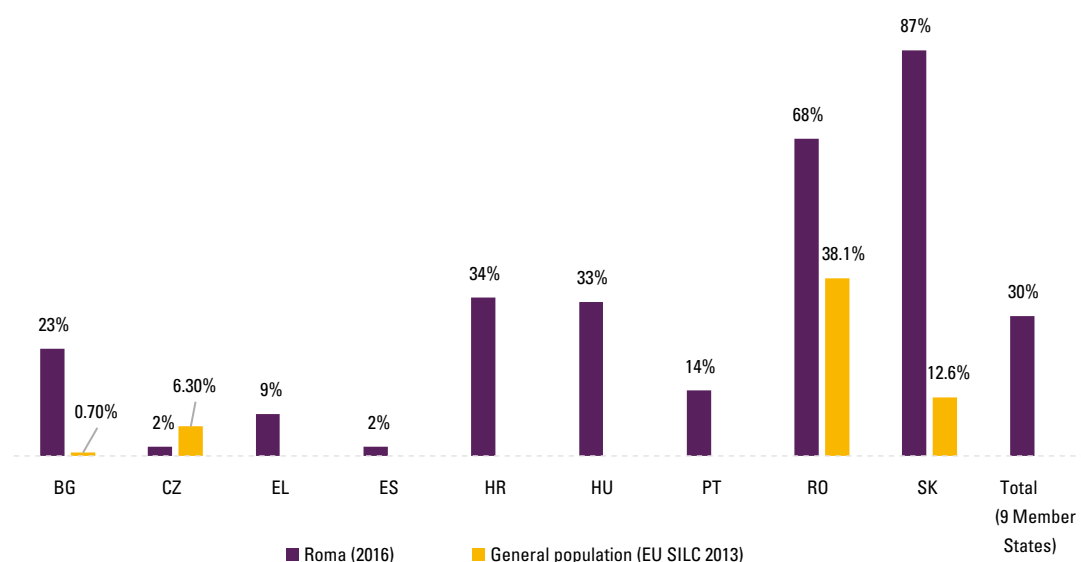
### Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Precarious hygiene conditions and inappropriate WASH facilities in Roma settlements, and in locations where migrants and refugees are residing, lead to poorer sanitation levels. The situation is worse with regard to access to clean drinking water through a connection to a water supply system with public access. EU-MIDIS II results show that, with the exception of the Czech Republic and Spain, the share of Roma living in households without tap water inside their dwelling is much higher than for the general population. For Roma, this ranges from 9% in Greece to 68% in Romania.<sup>137</sup>

Demand for water is outstripping supply on the Greek islands; in many cases, water tanker ships provide sufficient water, whilst in other cases groundwater or seawater desalination is used to provide enough water. Greece ranks high in the European water exploitation index (39.73%), measured as total fresh water use as a percentage of the renewable fresh water resources available, and second only to Cyprus.<sup>138</sup> This ranking illustrates the pressure on renewable freshwater resources due to water demand: any figure over 20% is considered as an indication of water scarcity, whilst figures over 40% (to which Greece is extremely close) indicate severe water scarcity, highlighting the lack of sustainability to the situation.<sup>139</sup>

**Figure 6:**

**Roma living in households without tap water inside the dwelling compared to the general population, by Member State**



Source: Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, FRA (2016)

## Right to education



Greece has made considerable gains in providing equitable access to education to all. However, in recent years, there has been a demonstrable correlation between educational provision and individual outcomes that show socio-economic background is linked to educational performance and can considerably affect achievement levels.

*“Access to information is an essential step to learn your rights”*

– *Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Education is a fundamental right for every child and free education to all citizens is a constitutional principle of the Greek state that includes 11 years of compulsory schooling, ages 4 to 15 years old. The education system is centrally managed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MoE), and includes curriculum development, staff recruitment and funding. Regional directorates oversee implementation of national policy at local level, including primary and secondary schools.

Central government expenditure on education decreased by 10% between 2012 and 2016, proportionally affecting secondary and tertiary levels more than primary education. Budget cuts also negatively impacted salaries (14.4% decrease since 2012), resulting in a government freeze on hiring new teachers and recruitment of up to 20,000 substitute teachers.<sup>140</sup> The most significant reductions in funding targeted vocational upper secondary schools (29%) and universities (20.7%).<sup>141</sup> During the economic crisis, private spending on education, accounting for one-third of overall education spending<sup>142</sup>, was also significantly lower (14.7% decrease between 2012 and 2016<sup>143</sup>) as a result of a generalised decrease in household earnings. During this period, Greek families cut back on school equipment and books and on tuition fees for supplementary private learning.

During the last four years, education reform plans in Greece have included initiatives such as all-day primary schools, modernisation of the existing curriculum, a new support scheme for primary and secondary education, school self-assessment and leadership appraisal, school governance reform, and the further rationalization of graduate studies – all of which support students and improve equity outcomes.<sup>144</sup> Last year’s (2020) reform included emphasis on skills development, quality assurance, curricula and textbook revisions as well as digital education and language learning. In addition, the reforms include a coherent framework for internal and external school assessment as well as a focus on students’ well-being through the role of teacher mediators (introduced as counsellors for students, teachers and parents) who are also trained at managing violent situations, in addition to the recruitment of psychologists and social workers in schools.<sup>145</sup> In 2018, the OECD published an Education Review on the state of education in Greece, which led to the identification of key challenges and corresponding recommendations. Following this review, the OECD noted positive efforts towards improved educational outcomes, including all-day schools, new databases of school indicators, and school self-evaluation mechanisms; Greece’s commitment to greater equity in educational provision and student outcomes underpinned such efforts.<sup>146</sup>

### **Access to Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

In 2018, kindergarten for 4-year-old children was integrated into the compulsory education scheme, as part of the primary education (Law 4521/2018). Since then, mandatory enrolment has been

in place for children to enter kindergarten at this age, a policy being rolled out over a three-year period. Just at the time of this legislative initiative Greece was falling short of the EU average for ECE (94.8%) with only 75.2%,<sup>147</sup> in 2019 (reference year 2018), significantly below the 95% EU 2020 target. There is an on-going gap between demand and supply as there remains an insufficient number of spaces available in kindergarten. The full enactment of the relevant legislation is anticipated in the school year 2021-2022, with municipalities currently able to apply for funding to build additional facilities. As a result of these efforts ECE participation rates are expected to rise.

### **Educational access and participation (primary and secondary)**

A limited education has a direct impact on the opportunity for individuals to continue their education, find and retain a job later in life, and keep up with rapid technological change and develop as active citizens. Greece has made considerable gains in providing an equitable access to education for all. In line with the provision of free education in Greece, the government provides textbooks and learning resources along with an authorized curriculum by the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Education Policy which is dispersed nationally. At age 12 children transfer from primary to secondary school, and at age 16 children enter upper secondary school. Greece has a relatively inclusive school system that does not divide children into separate academic tracks but rather seeks to provide a comprehensive education to all children until age 16.<sup>148</sup> At 16, children select a vocational pathway or remain on the academic track, which culminates in a highly competitive entry exam to university for those who have selected tertiary academic studies as opposed to technical college.

In spite of a favourable legislative and administrative environment, there remain challenges for children from certain groups. Children in rural areas are much more likely to leave school earlier than their urban counterparts (3.8% versus 11.2%) and only 14.9% of children with disabilities graduate from upper secondary or post-secondary education. In addition, the share of early leavers from education remains high among those born outside of the country – 17.9% in 2018.<sup>149</sup>

### **Quality of education**

While education is at heart of Greek family life, the education system and the schools in it require more assistance to empower every child, including children from minority groups and children with disabilities. Such work would focus both on inclusive early learning, through the continued expansion of early education programmes, as well as supporting improved quality primary and secondary education. Entrenched societal and parental attitudes and limited professional training in the classroom to fully engage children with disabilities must be combatted by dialogue on how to identify and respond to the specific needs of invisible and excluded children, resulting in an increased access to school for all children.

Average student performance in Greece lags behind many OECD countries in PISA testing, including countries with the same or lower levels of expenditure per student.<sup>150</sup> In 2018, Greek 15-year-olds underachieved by 30.5% in reading, 35.8% in mathematics and 31.7% in science.<sup>151</sup> This situation is exacerbated for students from disadvantaged socio-economic or migratory backgrounds who consistently underachieve in these subjects. While PISA identified that Greek students are motivated and have a strong sense of school belonging, data also revealed low levels of classroom discipline (noise, late starting times, not listening), and frequent skipping of classes or entire days of school at rates higher than OECD averages.

The centralized approach to government decision-making can lead to limited autonomy and affect the ability of schools to respond to local needs. In response to this, law 4547 in 2018 made changes to reorganise support structures in schools and includes measures to promote greater autonomy in schools such as, self-evaluation by schools, a more streamlined approach to resource management,

and new roles of educational coordinators (replacing school advisors). Internal evaluation was initiated in the 2020-2021 school year for all schools aiming at a bottom-up approach as far as local needs are concerned and reinforcing the planning at school level. This is expected to enhance school autonomy and improve schools and the quality of education they provide which, in combination with the external evaluation of the schools to be followed, will increase accountability. However, teacher evaluation and career development remain an area for further development. Reinforcing school improvement through assessment and professional development of teachers will decrease fragmentation and increase responsibility and oversight by schools.<sup>152</sup> The MoE is currently designing an evaluation strategy of the education system including the evaluation of teachers which will provide valuable data and help with long-term strategy concerning quality in education.

There are also gaps in the provision of quality education related to key resources, notably around investment in school infrastructure and insufficient numbers of teachers. Substitute teachers are disproportionately prevalent in Greek schools, partly due to contract issues, with a negative impact on sustainability and continuity across classrooms. Increasing dependence on short-term recruitment and substitute teachers leads to inefficiencies in the provision of quality education while improved working conditions and continued support for teacher professionalism (learning opportunities and improved senior leadership) will further benefit schools. This is also true of non-teaching staff supporting schools including social workers, psychologists and community mediators where collaboration between the school, the parents and the community can be fostered.

To respond to social and regional inequities as well as reduce the share of early school leavers, particularly in rural areas, Greece established Zones of Educational Priority (law 3879/2010, Art. 26) providing resources to disadvantaged schools and students across geographical areas instead of focusing on individual vulnerable populations (e.g. Roma, children with a migrant and refugee background, Muslim minorities). While the implementation of this policy has not been fully realized, ZEP reception classes have been a very important part of implementation policies. Specific barriers and recent developments on responding to the educational needs of refugee and migrant children are discussed in the Thematic Chapter, entitled “Children on the Move”.

Many Greek children attend after school tutoring, either privately or within groups, known as *frontistirio*; participation among 15-year-old Greeks in private tutoring is the highest among OECD countries. Data from a household survey in 2014 showed 99% of pupils in their final year at secondary school received some form of private tutoring. Children in urban areas are more likely to receive some form of additional tutoring than their rural counterparts, resulting in urban pupils more likely to achieve better grades and enrolment in preferred tertiary institutions. Sometimes referred to as a ‘shadow’ education, these private learning facilities are in fact a visible and regulated component of the education system and seek to supplement daily learning as well as remedy missed educational components.

Greek students at secondary level are primarily studying a curriculum based on rote-learning topics geared towards preparing them for final exams and does not promote the development of skills and competencies. The MoE is taking steps to improve the situation and is prioritizing the development of a new curricula that will focus on soft and digital skills.

*“Teachers focus on just teaching the curriculum and not providing to students the skills they need in life”*

– Children and youth consultation, Greece 2021

Where data is available, public expenditure data in education and administrative data are often unreliable and internally inconsistent.<sup>153</sup> While the PISA assessment of competencies is not aligned to the Greek national education system, there is no national data available to analyse student performance beyond attendance completion data.<sup>154</sup> Lack of a clear approach to educational data, entailing the involvement of several ministries, highlights a fragmented approach to the development and use of educational data. This leads to a gap in understanding of school and student outcomes, which in turn limit the capacity of schools already constrained by centralised decision-making, to reform and adjust their course.

## Right to protection



Overall, the governance of child protection in Greece is fragmented by overlapping mandates and accountabilities spread across various ministries and levels. Centrally, child protection accountabilities are included in the mandate of seven Ministries: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Citizen's Protection, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Yet, a strong child protection mandate also lies with Regional and Municipal Authorities. In addition to the CRC, Greece has adopted several national laws for the prevention and protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation. However, legislation on child protection is equally fragmented resulting in gaps that are not easily identified and take time to be filled. There are also coordination challenges at operational level, chief among them being the lack of common action protocols among ministries with different mandates in terms of child protection, the adoption of different tools and protocols for case management by regional and municipal authorities and, finally, the difficulty in tracking public expenditure on child protection issues.

Specific barriers and recent developments on responding to the protection needs of refugee and migrant children are discussed in the Thematic Chapter, entitled "Children on the Move".

### Birth registration and documentation

Greece has recently digitalized birth registration procedures which normally take place at public and private maternity hospitals and clinics immediately after birth. An infant receives its Social Security Insurance Number (AMKA) at birth and is automatically eligible to receive the Social Security benefits of their parents. In the case of mothers giving birth without identification documents, a specific procedure as described in Law 4554/2018 (art. 62) is followed<sup>155</sup>.

In addition, Law 4659/2020 provides the opportunity for a family to apply for a childbirth benefit of 2,000 EUR, which previously was not available. The new system is managed by the Welfare Benefits & Social Solidarity Organization (OPEKA), which also decides on eligibility for the childbirth benefit - prerequisites include that the child be born in Greece and that the parent or legal guardian resides legally and permanently in Greece (according to a specific list of countries) for twelve years prior to the birth. If only the father falls into one of the above-mentioned categories but does not reside in Greece, the mother can have access to the benefit if she meets the criteria. In addition, the family income must not exceed 40,000 EUR annually.

From February to May 2020, 14,770 birth registrations were digitally completed. This simplified process is expected to improve child and family welfare and protection as well as respond to several protection issues previously identified, such as the abandonment of newborns at maternity hospitals and the separation of newborns from family members at the hospital due to lack of



documentation. As a result, the number of children without birth certificates is expected to decrease and, consequently, more hard-to-reach and vulnerable children (e.g. Roma, children with migrant or refugee backgrounds) will be “visible” to Social Welfare Authorities from birth. However, more information outreach would help communicate further these developments to hard-to-reach vulnerable groups such as Roma communities living in rural areas, religious minorities that may choose to give birth at home, and migrant and refugee families that do not have easy access to information published in Greek.

### **Greek citizenship**

Law 4735/2020 modified the Code of Greek Citizenship which establishes an increase in prerequisites for obtaining the Greek citizenship, including proof of stable work in the country and minimum income equal to the minimum salary of an unskilled worker, increased costs to participate in the mandatory written test, and increased time of legal residency in the country from 3 to 7 years. The new prerequisites are added to those already established with Law 4332/2015, which foresaw that second generation migrants could receive Greek citizenship if they are born in Greece and are registered in the first grade of Primary School during the application for citizenship procedures. This same Law foresees that migrants who are not born in Greece, were not registered in the first grade but later, but have completed nine (9) years of formal education in Greece, can still acquire the Greek citizenship. If the parents apply for their child’s citizenship later, the child should still attend school to receive the citizenship.

It would be beneficial to monitor the long-term effects of legislative developments in this area, especially on some of the most vulnerable groups who are at risk of social exclusion such as refugees and migrants, Roma population and stateless people, and to identify any equity issues that may arise. For example, after ten years of financial crisis and severe austerity measures where unemployment rates have increased, more Greek citizens face job insecurity and precarious work positions and the individual and average family income has decreased significantly for the local population.

### **Children without parental care**

A child’s right to protection is strongly related to the provision of a safe, accepting and encouraging environment in which children are able to grow healthy, develop skills, play and thrive. However, a number of children in Greece are deprived of their families, or lack parental care. Among those children who lack parental care are children living in institutions including children with disabilities, children in detention, and children on the move either unaccompanied or separated from their families.

### **Children residing in out-of-home care**

With Law 4109/2013, public child protection institutions located in each region of the country were merged with those hosting adults with chronic diseases, disabilities and elderly into Regional Social Welfare Centers, supervised by the General Directorate of Social Solidarity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). The Ministry of Justice also supervises five Child Protection Associations that have limited capacity to host (usually, as an emergency measure) children in need of urgent protection. In addition to the public institutions, there are also private care facilities run by NGOs, philanthropic societies or associations, and the Orthodox Church of Greece. Only some of those institutions also host children with disabilities.

Over the last few years, the government has taken steps to improve the situation for children lacking parental care. With Law 4538/2018, the Greek State reformed the legislative framework for foster

care and adoption, and a National Registry of Minors and Special Registries of Minors in need of Fostering, as well as a National Registry of Prospective Foster Carers have been established. Also, with Ministerial Decision 13734/538 in April 2019, the development and implementation of an Information System for Special and National Registries of minors in need of fostering, foster carers and adoptions is foreseen. Within its broader vision towards childcare reform, the government is also in the final stages of drafting a National Strategy on De-institutionalization. Spearheaded by the MoLSA, the strategy will help develop a framework of social care that supports the full participation of all members of society. Specifically, the main priorities in relation to children include empowering families and children by strengthening prevention mechanisms and support services, developing alternative care measures and moving towards family and community-based care while transforming existing institutions, promoting inclusive education for all children, and developing support programmes for children leaving care.

According to the MoLSA, in October 2020, 1,689 children are hosted in public (656) and private (1033) institutions, however there is a concern that this number might not include all children in institutions in Greece. While in public institutions the majority of children are boys (395, 60,21%), in private institutions the majority are girls (583, 56,43%). Of the 1,689 children, only 18 are over 18 years old, while no age information is provided for 26 children. The registry of children in institutions, although already in place, is still under improvement, as more indicators (disability, type and severity of disability, time spent in institutions) are expected to be included. Some private institutions are still in the process of being included in the periodic provision of data on hosted children. The National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) is responsible for the collection and treatment of data on children in institutions.

Further attempts need to be made to ensure the protection and welfare of children in out-of-home care. The current system still relies heavily on large-scale residential care and does not prioritize gatekeeping and the redirecting of resources into preventive and family-based services (e.g. kinship care or foster care) or community-based care such as small-scale residential homes. Particularly, the current system does not have the capacity (at central, regional and municipal level) to invest efforts in proactively supporting the reuniting of institutionalized children with their family. The lack of supportive programmes for vulnerable families at community level makes institutionalized care the reality for many children. The existing institutions are under-resourced in specialized staff and materials, and many facilities are in poor conditions or inadequate to host children of different ages and provide appropriate care. Specifically, many institutions function without specialized staff, staff change quickly, specialized training to staff members is not provided, and employees often present acute burn-out, and are not supported by adequate supervision. Some institutions rely heavily on volunteers in place of specialized staff<sup>156</sup>.

There is no uniformed regulatory framework for the operation of residential care facilities. In addition, there is no systematic monitoring framework in order to evaluate the impact of care facilities' programmes in a child's development and their special educational, health and mental health, and leisure needs. This gap also hinders the ability of the state to nationally plan in the long term for children without parental care. In addition, there are legislative gaps in the guidelines for the establishment and operation of private institutions, since the permit is based upon administrative and quantitative criteria, while no qualitative criteria are defined. Children with disabilities seem to have more basic needs unmet, as children with severe mental retardation, autism and/or severe behavioural problems require specialized care that is not provided by institutions.<sup>157</sup>

The current system lacks policies and practices to support children in institutions who are ageing out, leading to increased risks of homelessness, exploitation, unemployment and social exclusion. More and more, child protection institutions host children from varied ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, but lack of funding and, thus, lack of specialized personnel and material resources,

hampers the ability of institutions to cover specific language and cultural needs of children. It is also important to note that there are no feedback mechanisms for children living in institutions or with adoptive and foster families, in order for their voices to be heard. Finally, the public finance of child protection institutions is not as transparent as it should be, in order to be easily monitored and its impact assessed.

In Greece, the number of adoptions has decreased over the years (from 543 in 2012 to 283 in 2019) and the process involves heavy bureaucratic procedures as well as suffers from lack of sufficient personnel to carry out social research and follow up on individual cases. Foster care has never been centrally supported and promoted nor is it extensively known by Greek society. Although steps have been taken, to support and develop the foster care system at local level information and awareness raising campaigns for the general public as well as financial investments are needed. Professional and/or small-scale family-based foster care could also be improved to provide for children with special needs who require specific support. In general, community-based care alternatives in Greece is limited (e.g. small-scale care, kinship and foster care) as well as small-scale residential homes as opposed to large institutions that have been proven to cause significant and long-lasting harm to child development<sup>158</sup>.

### **Children in detention**

Overall, the number of children and youth in detention has been decreasing since 2001, albeit increased numbers in 2011 (824) and 2012 (755). In November 2020, 34 adolescents from 15 to 18 years of age were in detention, including 3 girls. Regarding women in detention, incarcerated mothers are allowed to keep their child up to 3 years of age at which time the child would enter a care facility if an appropriate family alternative could not be found.

The Greek state has made steps towards reforming the penal code, particularly with regards to children. The minimum age, at which some kind of penalty or measure can be applied, has been increased from 8 to 12 years old. For children 12 to 15 years old, only remedial or therapeutic measures are applied. For children from 15 to 18 years of age, in addition to remedial and/or therapeutic measures, confinement in a juvenile detention centre may be imposed.

There are three special juvenile detention centres in Greece as well as a Juvenile Education Institute for boys, however there has not been one for girls since 1997. Children in detention are deprived from parental care and the penitentiary system does not provide the opportunity for young offenders to develop stable and caring relations with specialized and well-trained professionals. Juvenile detention centers are characterized by poor building facilities and spaces that are not designed to respond to children's needs for leisure, educational activities and sports. In addition, children are classified according to their legal cases and share common spaces regardless of age or developmental stage. Juvenile detention centres are not staffed and equipped adequately to support the needs of children who do not speak Greek and come from different cultural environments. The Ombudsperson has reported that Juvenile detentions are often overcrowded and the rights of children to privacy, dignity and security are strongly violated<sup>159</sup>. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), although recognized some positive steps, refers to the need to ensure privacy and security in Juvenile detention<sup>160</sup>. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the deprivation of parental care of children in detention is more pronounced due to restrictions applied to visitors.

## Violence against children

Exposure to violence constitutes a serious violation of child rights and has been recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a major public health issue. The four main types of child maltreatment are: physical, psychological, sexual violence and neglect. However, changing societal norms and technology have added new forms of violence against children including on-line violence and bullying, child pornography, smuggling and trafficking, and incitement to racist violence.

*“I live in a very small society where everyone knows that bad things happen but does not speak out. That is why it is important on a national scale to speak about abuse and not be afraid. We must be courageous, or nothing will change.”*

– *Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Violence against children remains a serious, multi-faceted and complex phenomenon in Greece. The Greek legal framework to prevent and fight violence against children is very well developed but extremely fragmented and suffers from a lack of official disaggregated data on violence against children and an absence of a unified registry for cases of child maltreatment. National NGOs in Greece report that at least 7,500 children under the age of 5 suffer from some form of abuse every year.<sup>161</sup> The latest information<sup>162</sup> from a national SOS helpline for children supported by the Smile of the Child, shows that more than 26,700 calls were recorded in the first 6 months of 2020: a 34% increase compared to 2019. Nearly a quarter of these calls concerned children in danger (including allegations of abuse, child neglect, ad hoc interventions, child beggary and child trafficking). In addition, based on data provided by the Hellenic Police [covering a period of 8 months for each year (2019 and 2020)] there were 1,214 child victims of which: 600 were victims of offences related to physical violence (359 were victims of offences of sexual violence, 219 were victims of domestic violence, and 36 children were victims of offences related to abduction). The majority (62%) of child victims concerned children up to 14 years old. In 2018, 2,864 women reported being victims of gender-based violence to the National SOS helpline, of which 64% were mothers.

Over the last 15 years, Greece has strengthened its legislative framework to prevent and fight violence and child maltreatment (Refer to Annex on Legislation) with the implementation of Law 3500/2006 aiming to combat domestic violence and protect its victims, including children as well as Law 4531/2018, which specifies further measures against domestic violence and also recognizes forced marriage as a form of human trafficking. The Lanzarote Convention (Council of Europe) on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse came into force in Greece with Law 3727/2008,<sup>163</sup> and Law 4267/2014 harmonized Greek legislation with Directive 93/2011/EU on fighting against sexual abuse and exploitation of children and child pornography. The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols – the Palermo Protocol - was ratified with Law 3875/2010, and the Council of Europe’s Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings with Law 4216/2013. The Law 4198/2013 harmonized the national legislation with Directive 36/2011/EU for the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings and the protection of victims; Law 3692/2008 describes the agreement between Greece and Albania to collaborate in the fight against child trafficking and the need to protect child victims who have been trafficked. The Migration Code (applied with Law 4251/2014) foresees special measures for the protection of children victims of human smuggling, Law 4478/2017 establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

In addition to existing legislation, the Ministry of Citizens Protection is developing a new Action Plan on Anti-Crime Policy (2020 -2024), while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is developing an Action Plan for the prevention and fight against human trafficking, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is in the process of codifying child protection legislation.

Fragmented data are collected by different organizations, but there is no availability of unified information on cases per form of violence, profile of victims, profile of perpetrators, services needed and provided, and remedies' results. Thus, targeted policy making is impossible due to lack of solid evidence across different periods of time. The lack of a Central Coordination Authority for Child Protection creates serious coordination difficulties at operational level, and at all governance levels – central, regional and municipal. It also creates barriers to the development of a central mechanism for the uniformed registration and follow-up of child abuse and neglect cases, as well as to the adoption of a common tool for the uniformed registration of child abuse and neglect cases.

Limited resources, including funding and staff, create additional bottlenecks to the full implementation of existing policies. EKKA, which has the responsibility to coordinate, monitor and train social welfare professionals working at regional and municipal level with child protection cases, is understaffed which hampers its ability to effectively deliver on its mandate. In addition, social services of regions and municipalities face severe lack of personnel, while some municipal social services are practically inactive as they are not staffed. Although there is no available data regarding all personnel working at child protection services around Greece, the example of the two largest municipalities of Greece is indicative of the lack of social welfare staff at local level: in the social services of Athens and Thessaloniki (child population >93.000 and >46.000, respectively), there are 3 Social Workers in Athens, 2 of which manage exclusively child-related cases and 2 social workers in Thessaloniki managing exclusively child-related cases.

*“It is very important that children have access to a psychologist or a specialist that they can speak to”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Funding is limited at local level and is instead made available centrally which is likely to remain so in the absence of a detailed child protection needs assessment which could lead to a possible re-allocation of funding based on regional and municipal needs. There is lack of unified procedures and tools to guide child abuse and neglect (CAN) case management at central, regional and municipal level; procedures and tools differ between Municipalities and depend on the available staff, staff's experience and personal investment on CAN cases. There is also lack of an institutionalized framework for the timely identification and management of cases of violence against children for schools, at all educational levels. In many cases, local Authorities lack appropriate space for receiving children with families. There is not a registry of non-state actors per region and municipality that could support Municipal Authorities to deal with CAN cases. Managing CAN cases at local level becomes even more difficult when there is no Juvenile Prosecutor allocated in that area. Systematic and uniformed training on legislative developments, children's rights, CAN case management's tools and protocols addressing social welfare, health and mental health, justice and law enforcement personnel does not take place, resulting in professionals' heterogeneous knowledge and attitudes towards CAN cases and, consequently in difficulties in coordination and collaboration between professionals' sectors. The extremely limited community-based mental health services for children create further difficulties in managing CAN cases at local level. Many children who require mental health services must move to Athens or Thessaloniki in order to access public services. Overall, there is an absence of prevention and early intervention services at community level to support

families at risk for violence against children, notably by failing to address parents who face problems known to be related with domestic violence, such as substance abuse and alcoholism.

There are no emergency shelters for child victims of violence: a rescued child is usually taken to one of two Children's Hospitals in Athens and awaits the prosecutor's engagement, which can take more than a month. One NGO reported that their emergency shelter could not function because children in their care faced indefinite administrative delays of up to one year, and the centre therefore closed. The prosecutors' offices responsible for child protection interventions often lack social research and background on children put under their jurisdiction owing to a lack from social welfare professionals, resulting in severe work overload and a significant casework backlog. Prosecutors' offices sometimes engage NGOs for social research purposes, leading to local authorities creating an unofficial network of locally acting organizations to support the management of child abuse and neglect cases. This results in a more informal and heterogeneous system, which neither triggers coordination between government agencies nor serves to ensure the collection of official child protection data.

*“Children can experience abuse and violence in their immediate environment...they should speak out”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

State and non-state actors supporting child abuse and neglect cases lack the systematic presence of interpreters and cultural mediators to support non-Greek speaking children, and children from a non-Greek culture. Child protection services do not provide language, cultural and religious adaptations. In sexual exploitation cases the lack of interpretation and cultural mediation is thought to adversely affect the child's participation. In general, the child protection system in Greece has not established feedback mechanisms addressing the children who receive their services. Consequently, the voices of children are not heard and the system is not informed on child-reported needs and wishes.

### **Racist Violence**

In 2015, the Ombudsperson reported that media, NGOs and the Office of the Ombudsperson itself registered 216 certified cases of racist violence, motivated by differences in nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. The Racist Violence Recording Network reported that out of 104 cases of racist violence in 2019, 16 cases were against children from 12 to 17 years old.<sup>164</sup>In 2015, the National Council against Racism and Intolerance (constitutional Law 4356/2015) was founded with the mandate to develop the National Action Plan against Racism as well as to monitor its implementation and review. The first National Action Plan against Racism and Intolerance was adopted on December 2020.<sup>165</sup>

In its yearly report for 2019, the Network on Reporting Racist Violence observed an increase in racist violence on the part of law enforcement and public officials and suggests the redistribution of the Manual produced by the Network on the obligations of civil servants and public service officials to respect all persons without exemptions, with special reference to the personnel of the Ministry of Citizen Protection, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Education<sup>166</sup>. Data on the effectiveness and impact of the legislative framework against racism and hate speech is not collected, therefore prohibiting evidence-based prevention and intervention programs.

### **Systemic violence, social norms and beliefs**

Re-victimization during judicial procedures and, until recently, the practice of protective custody and administrative detention to migrant children (abolished end of 2020) are two examples of systemic violence that have already been discussed above. Systemic violence is also expressed through socially accepted aggressive narratives about child-related issues. Especially during the migrant and refugee crisis, persons in positions of authority<sup>167</sup> as well as the media<sup>168</sup>, often expressed aggressive narratives about refugee and migrant children in Greece. Such attitudes are known to affect the beliefs and attitudes of the general public towards being more xenophobic and aggressive towards foreigners. In addition, the narrative of legislation and of public documents need to be reviewed in relation to issues such as gender, minorities and disability; many of those public documents were initially written in a language that today is considered gender insensitive or as promoting discriminatory beliefs and attitudes towards different social groups. The failure to proactively ban racist and discriminatory public speaking, and the failure to review and change the language of official documents will result in sustaining similar attitudes and beliefs in the society in general.

Despite the strong legal framework existing in Greece, gaps in funding, coordination and evidence-informed planning as well as fragmentation of responsibilities continue to persist which impact the state's ability to effectively implement relevant legislation. The lack of a unified legal framework on child protection creates barriers to the translation of laws into policy and professional practice as well as negatively impacts children's access to justice. The state's mandate to prevent violence against children and to fight against child maltreatment is also extremely fragmented among six ministries (often with unclear roles between Ministries, Directorates and Departments).

### **Child trafficking**

Complying with the relevant national and international legislation, Greece has put in place a formal national identification and referral system (NRM) for victims and presumed victims of trafficking (Ministerial Decision 30840/20.9.2016). The mechanism, supervised by the Office of the National Rapporteur (MoFA) and managed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA, MoLSA), operates as a hub for coordinated action and partnership building, among all actors involved in combating human trafficking. Law 4636/2019 on international protection and other provisions establishes the obligation of the competent authorities to inform NRM upon identification of a human trafficking victim. According to EKKA's report for 2019, out of 154 referred victims of human trafficking, 49 were children, 11 of whom unaccompanied. Out of the 49 children, 26 were girls, 17 were boys and for 6 children the sex was not specified. In terms of nationality, 19 child victims had Greek nationality and all of them were exploited through forced begging. The rest of the children came from Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Pakistan and other countries. For those children without legal status in the country, the responsible actor took all necessary actions to provide legal residency for the victim, as is foreseen by The Migration and Social Integration Code, Law 4251/2014. In most child victims' cases, parents were indicated as the recruiters, in relation mostly to the exploitation of begging. Concerning the form of exploitation, child victims were: sexually exploited (N = 11, all girls), forced labor (N = 4, 3 boys and 1 girl), forced begging (N = 28, 15 boys, 13 girls, 5 unknown sex), forced marriage (N = 1, girl), recruitment in armed operations (N = 1, boy), and forced criminality (N = 1, girl). In addition, 21 of the female victims were accompanied by their children at the time of the referral, and 11 were pregnant. In most cases, exploitation took place in Greece, while the second most likely place of exploitation was Turkey (specifically in relation to refugees and migrants who came to Greece through Turkey).

Greece has made important legislative, policy and operational steps to fight human trafficking. Particularly, the NRM data will provide a robust basis for future policy making. However, further training to law enforcement and social welfare front-line professionals is needed, particularly the

widening of the range of professional sectors that receive training. It would be beneficial if varied professionals such as, judges and prosecutors, lawyers, health and paramedic professionals, police, firefighters, coastguards as well as regional and municipal social welfare professionals receive specialized training on the identification of child victims, provision of emergency welfare support, and long-term case management of child victims of human trafficking. In addition, specialized safe houses for child victims of human trafficking do not exist in Greece. Child victims are hosted in child protection institutions, where the personnel do not have the expertise to manage such cases and safety measures are not always adequate (traffickers often attempt to “claim” their victim back). Also, there are no social reintegration programmes for child victims of human trafficking, such as free access to cultural and sports activities, free public transportation, and easy access to vocational training.

Sustainable state funding should be secured for targeted prevention programmes addressing particularly vulnerable populations (such as some Roma and unaccompanied children). According to reports from field professionals, it would also be beneficial to issue an Interpretative Circular to support authorities responsible for the identification of cases of child forced begging, in which children are forced into begging by family and other relatives, which would explain the combined usage of paragraph 323A of the Penal Code, with Law 4216/2013 and make specific reference to the consideration of the victim’s consent and interpersonal power dynamics in the context of child trafficking.

### **Child marriage**

The prevalence of child marriages is currently less than half of what it was twenty years ago (2,883 child marriages were registered in 2000) and since 2011 the rate of child marriage has remained broadly stable.

Under the Civil Code (art. 1350), marriage is forbidden for children under 18 years old, however, it can be allowed for an important reason based on a court decision. It is also worth noting that the law recognizes the minimum age of consent to sexual intercourse as 15 years of age. From 2000 to 2019, 35,964 marriages involving at least one person below the age of 19 took place. Of those, 831 marriages involved at least one individual below 15 and 86% of minors who got married were girls.<sup>169</sup> Nearly one third of child marriages took place in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. There is no data on the nationality of minors who were married; however, there are reports that child marriage is still socially accepted among the Muslim minority<sup>170</sup> and among Roma communities<sup>171</sup>; however, further research is needed on this issue. It should also be noted that non-registered forms of familial cohabitation are known to take place in some ethnic and religious communities and are not included in the official statistics. In 2018 and 2019, 4,532 babies were born to mothers below 19 years of age.<sup>172</sup>

With the adoption of the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention in the Greek legislative framework with Law 4531/2018, forced marriage has been legally recognized as a form of human trafficking and the legal practice of no criminal prosecution if a marriage took place between the perpetrator and victim was also abolished. In addition, the Law 4511/2018 made the use of sharia law by the Muslim minority of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace optional (until then, sharia law was mandatory among the population).

There is lack of qualitative data on child marriages relating to the nationality and ethnicity of the minor involved, the type of marriage, and the reasons that were considered as acceptable by a judge. There is also a lack of a registration mechanism of familial co-habitation among minors and adults in a conjugal-type relationship. Sex and reproductive health education is not provided systematically to school-aged children. Regional and municipal authorities have a serious lack of social welfare professionals to proactively reach out to vulnerable communities and inform on the



risks of child marriage, the violation of child's rights that child marriage entails as well as to follow up and support minors who are married and may be at an even greater risk of social exclusion, violence, and poverty. Awareness campaigns among the general population on the prevalence of child marriage have never been organized, and the social belief that child marriage is not an issue in Greece persists.

### **Children in street situations**

Homeless children include those who live and sleep on the streets or in unoccupied dwellings, wasteland or urban parks, whether alone or with other children or homeless adults. Poor children, children on the move, children without parental care, children in conflict with the law, and run-aways from home are more at risk of finding themselves in this situation. In the vast majority of cases, street children lack parental, emotional and psychological support and risk malnutrition, poor physical and mental health, violence and exploitation, drug abuse, and coming into conflict with the law.

There is no official data on the number of homeless children in Greece. A pilot study across seven municipalities in 2018 (coordinated by the MoLSA), found 1,645 homeless people of whom 954 in a temporary shelter and 691 living on the street, of whom one in every four (24.2%) was below 29 years old. Currently 1,019 UASC live in insecure housing conditions.

In Greece, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs bears the primary responsibility for planning, coordinating, funding, monitoring and evaluating the provision of services to homeless people, which is under the responsibility of local authorities and in many cases outsourced to NGOs. Many municipalities lack the capacity, expertise, and funding to develop sustainable prevention and intervention programmes for homelessness. There is limited outreach on the street (usually scattered and project-based through NGOs) and few places in community-based shelters.

Temporary accommodation is provided by Transitional Accommodation Hostels (usually for a period of up to six months), catering mostly for basic needs and providing psychosocial support and referral services while Day Centres for homeless people provide free-of-charge services. In addition, specialized mobile units and outreach teams provide primary healthcare and immediate emergency treatment for homeless people with drug addictions.

Greece has drafted and announced a Homelessness National Strategy, but it has not yet been issued officially. However, a housing benefit national programme has been operational since 2017 (law 4472/2017) and recently a social housing programme entitled "home and work for the homeless" (law 4756/2020) was initiated which aims to develop an holistic intervention for the reintegration of persons and families experiencing homelessness.<sup>173</sup> Yet, there is no official mechanism for the registration and monitoring of homeless children, youth and families, to inform prevention and intervention policy-making. Consequently, little is known about the number and profile of homeless children in Greece. No research has been carried out on the pull and push factors and on the groups who are most vulnerable. Of note, it has not been investigated whether the financial crisis has affected the number of homeless children, youth and families, or how many children at risk for poverty and social exclusion are also at risk of homelessness.

### **Child labour**

Child labour is classified as children too young to work or those involved in hazardous activities that may compromise their physical, mental, social or educational development. In 2017, the Labour Inspectorate reported 6,100 minors as legally working – most of them in food services (40%), accommodation services (30%) and retail (8.9%). According to the law, Regional Labour Inspectorates should maintain a registry and issue a work booklet to all minors who work. In 2017,

7,647 workbooks were issued; 4,028 for boys and 3,619 for girls, while the Labour Inspectorate issued fines to 12 enterprises for illegal child labour.<sup>174</sup> Beyond this data, there is no further information on the population of children legally working in Greece, nor on those who have been exploited for work purposes. ELSTAT data (2013) shows that the highest percentages of financially active children (as a percentage of the total child population per region) are in Thessaly (7.2%), Central Greece (7%), Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (6.9%), South Aegean (5.9%) and Crete (5.9%).

Three international conventions guide the issue of child labour and outline specific international minimum standards. These are the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 concerning minimum age for admission to employment (specifically Recommendation 146) (ratified with law 1182/1981); ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the elimination of the worst forms of child labour (notably Recommendation No. 190) (ratified with law 2918/2001), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 32); all of which Greece has ratified.

Child labour in Greece is regulated by specific laws and Presidential Decree 62/1998 which state that no child below 15 years of age should work, with the exception of some specific roles deemed appropriate where strict provisions for their health and security are met. In such cases a work booklet by the Labour Inspectorate will need to be issued, consent by the child's guardian obtained and guarantees made that the child's schooling will not be affected. Law 3850/2010 accepts that children may participate in occasional and short-term light work of familial character, such as agricultural and livestock work, with the prerequisite that those are taking place during the day. According to Laws 2918/2001 and 3850/2010, the development of Action Plans for the protection of working children and targeted action developed by the Labour Inspectorate, are foreseen, with approval by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

Concerning forced child labour, which is recognized as a form of trafficking in human beings, EKKA has collected such data (since 2019) in a systematic and comprehensive manner through the National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (NRM). In 2019, EKKA reported that 4 out of the 23 reported victims of forced labour were children; 35 children were victims of forced begging and one child was victim of forced criminal activities<sup>175</sup>. National NGOs also provide scattered information on child labour: for example, the NGO 'Arsis' reported that during the first semester of 2019 its street workers approached 550 children working illegally in the streets of Thessaloniki; of those, 450 were UASC and the rest were Greek nationals or children from the Balkan states.<sup>176</sup> The 2015-2016 National Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in Greece, developed by the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) shows that field organizations identify more victims of human trafficking than those officially certified as such by the Prosecutors. A great percentage of the non-officially certified victims were UASC boys, between 15 and 18 years old, with the majority presumed to be victims of forced labour or labour exploitation.

In spite of this solid legislative framework to protect children from illegal and hazardous work, Greece has not adopted the ILO Convention 129 (1969) on combatting labour exploitation in the agricultural sector, which provides a minimal mandate to the Labour Inspectorate to inspect open agricultural sites. This results in a gap in the protection of the child, as the agricultural sector is known to be a high-risk sector for child labour worldwide. Data show that most financially active children reside in agricultural regions of Greece and some of the regions that demonstrate high numbers of financially active children are host to the highest percentages of school dropouts. Reports from field organizations have also highlighted the significant number of UASC exploited in the agricultural sector.

There is lack of qualitative data on children working legally and children exploited for work purposes, notably as it relates to variables including gender, nationality, ethnicity, form of legal and illegal labour,

or geographical region. These are necessary in order to shed light on the real situation of child labour in Greece. In addition, there is a cooperation gap between the Labour Inspectorate and EKKA's database on child forced labour with data not routinely shared. Increased transfer of knowledge would help address information gaps on the most vulnerable work sectors for child labour and allow more targeted inspections on the part of the Labour Inspectorate.

The Labour Inspectorate is also challenged by the lack of a common protocol for systematic collaboration during inspections with welfare professionals and the police in cases of child labor exploitation. In addition, Labour Inspectors and welfare professionals are not adequately trained to identify and collaborate with minor victims of labour exploitation, and there are no specific guidelines for action in reference to cases of child forced labor.

Targeted sensitization campaigns on the hazardous effects of child labour on human and societal development have not been carried out. Trade unions and municipal authorities do not proactively act to prevent and eliminate child labour through local information campaigns or trainings for their staff. Limited opportunities for alternative activities and vocational training heightens children's involvement in inadequate, hazardous work. In addition, access to vocational training and to services linking them with the labour market are very limited for migrant and refugee children, rendering them extremely vulnerable to labour exploitation.

### **Children and Justice**

European and international human rights instruments recognize that children have the right to have their voice heard in all matters and procedures that concern them. Ensuring the effective participation of children in judicial proceedings is also vital for improving the operation of justice<sup>177</sup>, however, their access to justice first needs to be secured. Children's access to justice refers to the general ability of children to obtain a solution when their rights are being violated, not respected or denied. Access to justice may relate to criminal, administrative and/or civil matters and includes children accused of committing a crime; children who are a defendant, victim, or witness to a crime; children who are unable to access services like education or health care to which they are entitled; and children who are directly or indirectly part of legal proceedings that affect them.<sup>178</sup>

Judicial proceedings are complex for children to understand and time consuming which hinders their effective participation. To secure children's access and participation in judicial proceedings, the European Union and international organizations have issued directives and policies as well as developed tools to support states to reform their justice systems so that they become child-centered and child-friendly. UNICEF also has aggregated good practices and tools on restorative justice and alternatives to detention in the Toolkit "Diversion from judicial proceedings and alternatives to detention"<sup>179</sup>

Child friendly justice "refers to justice systems which guarantee the respect and the effective implementation of all children's rights at the highest attainable level.... It is, in particular, justice that is accessible, age appropriate, speedy, diligent, adapted to and focused on the needs and rights of the child, respecting the rights of the child including the rights to due process, to participate in and to understand the proceedings, to respect for private and family life and to integrity and dignity"<sup>180</sup>.

Greece has ratified two fundamental EU Directives that are relevant to a more child-friendly justice system: Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime with Law 4478/2017, and Directive 2016/800/EU on special safeguards for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings with Law 4689/2020. The Greek State also offers free legal aid to Greek citizens with low income, and to EU and third-country nationals with proof of legal permanent residency in the country.

The Greek legislative framework has undergone other significant developments over the last 20 years, such as:

- Law 3189/2003 on the reform of juvenile criminal law and other provisions;
- Law 3860/2010 on improvements in criminal law for juvenile offenders, prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency and crime;
- Laws 4322/2015 and 4356/2015 that modified specific provisions of the previous Penal Code;
- Law 4478/2017 (on the transposition of Directive 2012/29/EU) establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime;
- Law 4640/2019 on Provisions about “House of Child and other provisions” which modified provision of Law 4478/2017. It also foresees systematic collection of statistical data on the implementation of child’s rights during judicial procedures, every 3 years, starting from June 2021;
- Law 4619/2019 that ratified the new Penal Code;
- Law 4689/2020 on the Transposition of Directive 2016/800/EU on procedural guarantees for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings.
- A National Action Plan 2018–2020 for the Prison System has been developed that included measures relevant to children in conflict with law, to prevent juvenile delinquency, and to provide training to juvenile protection officers. The evaluation of this Action Plan has not yet been published.
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- Article 612 of the Code of Civil Procedure regarding the communication of a minor with a judge and the provision that the view of the minor may be taken into consideration.
- Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November 2003 concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility which foresees the child to be heard during such processes.
- Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1111 of 25 June 2019 on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction which foresees in article 21 the right of children to express their views and their view to be taken into account based on the child’s age and maturity.

### **Children in conflict with law**

A child in conflict with the law is “a child alleged to have, or accused of, or recognized as having infringed the criminal law after attaining the age of criminal responsibility and before the age of 18”<sup>181</sup>. In Greece, according to Penal Code (art. 126), it is forbidden to put a child below 15 years of age in detention, as criminal liability begins at the age of 12. For children aged 12 to 15 years, only correctional measures may be applied. The Juvenile Probation Offices in collaboration with community entities, the Juvenile Prosecutors and Juvenile Courts carry out monitoring of the alternatives to detention. The Law 4689/2020 that incorporated in the Greek legislative framework

the Directive 2016/800/EU foresees procedural guarantees for the protection of children suspected or accused of criminal proceedings. In 2016, the Greek Ministry of Justice published guidelines for juvenile protection officers working with children in conflict with the law and children in detention<sup>182</sup>, which promoted the application of social interventions and the principle of non-punitive justice. Main pillars of the guidelines include the development of counselling skills that should aim at an efficient communication between professionals and minors through verbal and non-verbal communication practices, the anger management of minors through relevant management methods, the understanding of critical ethical issues on behalf of the professionals such as confidentiality, autonomy and respect of the minor, and the protection of the minor.

Due to extensive reforms in the juvenile justice system of countries in Europe and Central Asia during the last 15 years, there has been a decrease by almost 60% of the total number of children in detention. In Greece, there are three special youth detention centers for adolescents and young adults from 15 to 21 years. The above-mentioned legislative developments are thought to have contributed to the considerable drop of the number of children in detention. In 2001, there were 704 minors in detention, while in 2015 the number dropped to 377. Of those 377, only 14 were girls and 363 were boys; 65 were from 14 to 18 years of age and 312 from 19 to 21 years old; 212 had non-Greek Nationality and 165 were Greek nationals.<sup>183</sup> As of 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020, there were 34 minors from 15 to 18 years of age in detention, including 3 girls. The vast majority of adolescents in detention are of non-Greek nationality, and boys<sup>184</sup>.

### **Prevention of juvenile delinquency and recidivism**

The Societies for Child Protection are public services supervised by the Ministry of Justice, which were founded at the headquarters of Regional First Instance Courts. For many years, they were based on volunteers and/or understaffed or inactive due to financial constraints. In July 2019, the Ministry of Justice concluded an open consultation in reference to the planning of a new law<sup>185</sup> which would modify the administrative and operational nature of the Societies for Child Protection and foresaw their absorption into one Public Agency called Greek Society for Child Protection, while the regional Societies would become local branches under the name of Juvenile Care Units. However, the planned Law was not adopted. Most Regional Societies are currently inactive, or provide very limited services, in most cases on prevention of juvenile delinquency. Often, they cover the gaps in local social welfare services. Considering the lack of social welfare support to Juvenile Prosecutors' Offices, the reform of the Greek Society for Child Protection has to be completed and urgently implemented. Towards that end, in June 2020, the Ministry of Justice established a Committee for the upgrading of the institutional framework of the Societies for Child Protection.

The offices of Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Services are peripheral structures of the Ministry of Justice and operate in the context of the First Instance Courts. They were established with Law 378/1976 and their operation is defined by P.D. 49/1979 and P.D.6/21. It is the only public agency that provides out-of-institutional care to minors who have committed criminal offenses or minors who are at risk to come into conflict with the law including the prevention of child delinquency and victimization. In a recent legal provision (P.D. 6/2021) the operational framework of the Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Services was defined and clarified which the Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Services are supervised by the head of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the First Instance Courts and the coordination of the inspection is done centrally by the Ministry of Justice. However, the Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Services are understaffed and overloaded, as there is also lack of family-support community services.

### **Support to children victims of and/or witnesses to crime**

Law 4478/2017 transposed into Greek legislation the Directive 2012/29/EU on the minimum standards of care for victims of crime. Special provisions are foreseen for minors in relation to their access to information, provision of support and protection during their participation in all criminal proceedings, in a language they understand, while the best interest of the child should guide all decisions related to a minor in judicial proceedings. The child victim shall also have the right to compensation, as well as the right for privacy. Specific measures are foreseen for the protection of people with disabilities during judicial proceedings. According to Law 3500/2006, children who witness violent acts between partners are also considered victims of domestic violence. Also, Laws 4478/2017 and 4640/2019 specify that children victims of crime shall be examined in special structures called “House of Child.” Independent Offices for the Protection of Minor Victims were established and are responsible for leading communication with children during criminal proceedings, as well as for the individualized evaluation of the best interest of the child and clarifying the need for adequate supportive and protective measures. The “House of Child” shall ensure the safe participation of children in judicial proceedings that concern them. However, although the Law foresees that testimonies of children victims of sexual crimes can be recorded and re-used during the judicial proceedings, without the presence of the child, the lack of audiovisual equipment, trained personnel and appropriate buildings for the procedure to take place, this measure is not fully applied. Currently, there are five such “House of Child” structures in Athens, Piraeus, Patra, Thessaloniki and Iraklio/Crete but none of the 5 Houses fully functions. According to a report by the Deputy Ombudsman for Children’s Rights in September 2020, they lack appropriate building infrastructure and equipment, are understaffed, and do not cover all regions of the country. Consequently, children victims of and witnesses to crime are not able to get the support foreseen by the minimum standards of care for victims of crime by Law<sup>186</sup>.

The Department of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Law 4478/2017 that establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime.

Based on the rationale of the law establishing the houses of the child, the sub-directorate for the Protection of Minors of Attica of the Hellenic Police plans soon to establish a special space for the examination of minors involved in penal procedures with the use of the required digital equipment in line with the Criminal Procedure Code (art. 227).

Laws 3811/2009 and 4689/2020 foresee the right of victims of crime to compensation. However, since 2009, only a few requests for compensation were filed to the responsible Committee, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. Victims’ limited access to information concerning the right to compensation seem to have been the main barrier to ensuring a victim’s right to compensation. Dissemination of information to social welfare professionals, lawyers and law enforcement personnel collaborating with children victims and their families on the revised procedures to enable compensation payments has taken place mainly through focus groups, the e-Justice portal, and targeted workshops.

### **Challenges to overcome for all children’s access to justice and for a more child-friendly justice system**

Whilst Greece has developed a fairly solid legislative framework to support children’s access and participation in judicial proceedings and to reform the justice system towards being more child-friendly, many barriers still need to be addressed, particularly concerning the lack of resources including infra-structure, the need for capacity building of professionals working in the Justice system, and the reform of judicial procedures to become more child-centered and child-friendly according to international standards and good practices.

Specifically, in relation to human resources, the limited support to the sections of family law in the First Instance Courts cannot respond to the real needs and subsequently the duration of judicial proceedings involving minors are often lengthy and arduous. In most Regions, there is not a Prosecutor specifically dealing with juvenile cases; usually, a Prosecutor with other duties will assume the mandate of Juvenile Prosecutor. For this reason, Juvenile Prosecutors are usually overloaded with cases and this fact also extends the duration of judicial procedures. As it has been stated by UNICEF/ECARO (2018), specialized competence in the professionals providing legal aid and services is paramount to ensure a child-centered and child-friendly justice system and keep children safe during the judicial procedures, and legal professionals should have knowledge of relevant domestic law and procedures, children's rights, children's developmental stages and how to communicate with children<sup>187</sup>. Also, Juvenile Prosecutors' Offices are not supported by social welfare professionals. In addition, Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Offices lack personnel to properly monitor the correctional measures applied to children in conflict with the Law, to follow up children in correctional institution and collaborate with children at risk to commit criminal offences. The Juvenile Probation and Social Assistance Officers are expected to collaborate with community services in the context of their mandate; however, Municipal Social Services are also understaffed and community-based mental health services for children in contact with Law and their families are scarce. The "House of Child" service also lacks skilled and adequate in numbers personnel.

Concerning material resources, sufficiency of services and infra-structure, the "House of the Child" service does not fully function, as appropriate infrastructure and equipment are needed. Also, only five (05) "House of Child" Departments are foreseen which are insufficient to cover all Regions of the country. In addition, there is only one correctional institution for boys in the city of Volos, while there are three Special Youth Detention Centers for male adolescents and young adults. If correctional measures are to be prioritized over imprisonment, more structures working upon correctional measures should be established. One such structure for girls is also necessary, as currently 3 girls are in women's detention in Thiva, and it is foreseen in the Penal Code (art. 122, par. 1, in point XII). More than half of adolescents and youth in detention are third-country nationals, who do not speak Greek, and carry cultural and religious beliefs different from those of their Greek inmates. The Penitentiary system does not cover such needs for non-Greek populations and there is a limited availability of interpreters and/or cultural mediators in those institutions. Also, penitentiary institutions suffer from poor building infrastructure; spaces have not been designed to respond to the needs of adolescents and youth. Institutions are overcrowded, depriving adolescents and youth from privacy and safety; hygiene is very limited. Although schools function inside the juvenile penitentiary institutions, they are usually understaffed and do not cover the educational needs of the non-Greek population.

There is urgent need for capacity building of professionals working in the Justice system and professionals who collaborate with children and families in contact with the Law, including Judges, Prosecutors, Law Enforcement, Welfare Personnel, Penitentiary Personnel, Lawyers and Administrative Personnel, on child's rights, child-centered and child-friendly justice. For example, there is a lack of capacitated State personnel to provide psychosocial and mental health support to the child and family during judicial proceedings, and staff in correctional and penitentiary institutions are generally unskilled and lack training on how to collaborate and manage adolescents and youth in detention.

Further, judicial procedures need to be reviewed and reformed towards becoming more developmentally appropriate for children, more gender-sensitive, and more child-centered and child-friendly. For example, children are not protected from recurrent exposure to different audiences of professionals during judicial procedures, as children often are called for to speak again and again to different people, about the crime they have suffered, witnessed or committed. Also, there are no feedback mechanisms in none of the child-related Justice's structures and services for children to

express their opinion, report abuse, and propose reforms so that their voice is adequately heard and their participation is ensured.

At policy level, there is no specific National Action Plan for a Child-Friendly Justice System; however, there is a relevant section included in the National Action Plan for Children's Rights which is currently being developed. Similarly, there is not a social re-integration plan at central, regional and municipal level for children in contact with Law and their families, and children who are released from detention or juvenile correctional facilities. Also, no action has been taken to reverse the negative social stereotypes about children in conflict with the law and their families, which are strongly held among local communities and adversely affect the effective re-integration of children who are released from penitentiary institutions, into local communities.

## Youth (15-24 years old)

Young people represent an enormous amount of talent, knowledge, and potential; thus, it is imperative that opportunities are made available for youth and adolescents to become champions of their rights and active participants in decision-making processes. These rights are at the core of UNICEF's mandate, closely linked to Agenda 2030 and the Global Goals, and a clear priority for the Government of Greece as it looks towards the future economically, socially and politically. The Government of Greece, along with the European Union, has recognized the importance of young people and has taken steps in recent years to promote programmes and planning focused on engaging this particular age group.

During the economic crisis, the Greek National Reform Programme provided 'specific targeted interventions to tackle high youth unemployment and entrepreneurship.' The main goals of the programme included job creation; reinforcement of vocational education and training and of apprenticeship schemes; the establishment of school-to-work programmes; reinforcement of counselling and career guidance for young people; and strengthened youth access to entrepreneurial sectors.<sup>188</sup> From 2016 onwards, Greece has introduced various measures to improve the quality of VET with an emphasis on improving the labour market relevance of VET studies by increasing work-based learning. More specifically, the programme "A New Beginning at EPAL" have contributed lately to the increase of participation in vocational education, the "Apprenticeship Class", a new post-secondary study option, was approved in 2016 (Law 4386/2016)<sup>189</sup> and as of 2018 graduates from Special Vocational Schools may enroll in regular Apprenticeship Classes<sup>190</sup> which by 2020 were available in 28 specializations. The Apprenticeship Class was presented as an example of successfully implemented European Social Fund projects all over Europe<sup>191</sup> spurring apprenticeship nationwide as a route to excellence. Lately, the new VET Reform (law 4763/2020) includes positive measures for NEET, VET, LLL in different educational pathways.

At a regional level, the European Commission has taken steps over recent years to promote programmes and planning focused on engaging youth. Between 2014 and 2020, the EU allocated 250 million EUR to 57,000 unemployed youth in Greece.<sup>192</sup> Many of the Commission's identified priorities align with national priorities for Greece<sup>193</sup> In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles was launched and is based on a number of principles relevant to youth, including the rights of all to fair working conditions and equal treatment alongside social protection and inclusion for all European citizens. European priorities are focused on the empowerment of youth to enable them to better meet their own needs and confront existing and emerging challenges. The Youth Guarantee initiative (YEI) is arguably the most important policy response to support youth not in education, employment or training (NEET). Launched at the end of 2013, this 260 million EUR initiative developed 'second chance' programmes in secondary education, training programmes to enhance



skills and qualifications, internships, and further specific actions to target youth with disabilities. An EU-wide project, it aims to facilitate structural reforms and innovation in policy design across EU Member States.<sup>194</sup> It was launched to provide support to young people living in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012, and was then continued with a further instalment of funding from 2016 onwards for countries facing similar unemployment criteria. Greece has benefited from such programmes that have supported a total of 58,000 young people aged 18-29 years old.<sup>195</sup>

The President of the European Commission identified six new priorities for the Commission for 2019-2024,<sup>196</sup> which includes youth unemployment, and recognises that ‘young people face a difficult start in the labour market, but they deserve all possible opportunities to develop their full potential.’ The priorities pertinent to youth also include the EU’s digital future, as the strategy endeavours to ‘make the digital transformation work for people and businesses’ within a structure of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050.

In Greece, there exists the Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth currently implemented between 2017-2027 originally under the responsibility of the General Secretariat for Youth but, since July 2019, integrated into the General Secretariat for vocational education, training and lifelong learning. Monitoring of the strategy also includes the authoring of an Annual Progress Report, but it is not clear whether this has been undertaken as published reports have not reached the public sphere.

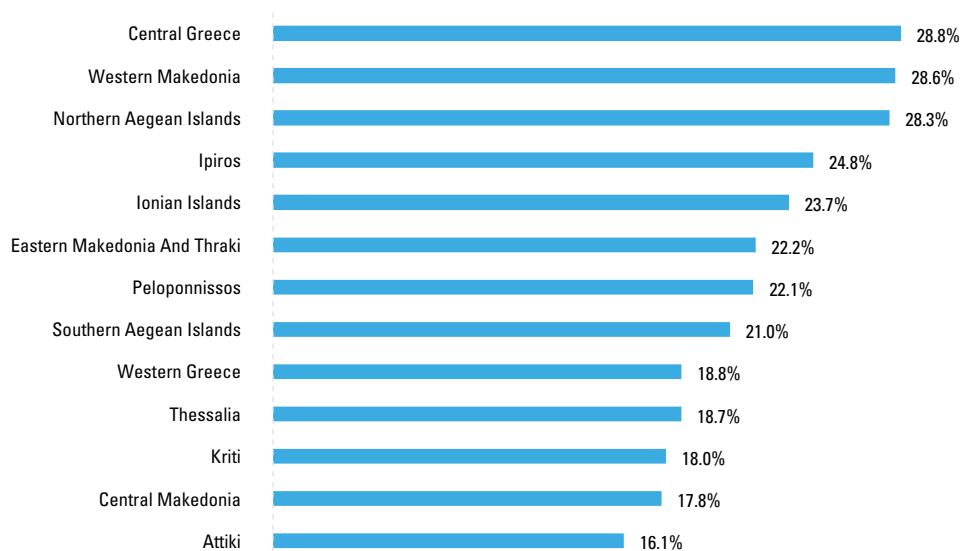
The objectives and clearly articulated indicators of this strategy are closely aligned to the achievement of the SDGs, including a roadmap for promoting young people’s self-reliance, independence and facilitation to adulthood; affordable and quality education, training and apprenticeship; decent work and development of youth entrepreneurship; health, welfare and wellbeing, reinforcement of the participation of young people in democratic life; reduction of inequalities among young people; and youth friendly cities and the demographic renewal of the periphery. EU and national budgets provide the funding for the strategy and implementation of the framework is to be conducted through individual programmes which will be adjudicated on their merit and added value, on the target beneficiaries, and on project evolution.<sup>197</sup>

### **NEET population in Greece**

The term NEET captures an empirical category of youth marginalization in a more holistic way than traditional measures of exclusion, such as the unemployment rate,<sup>198</sup> and concerns youth who are neither employed nor have received any formal or non-formal education or training in the 4 weeks preceding surveys conducted. In 2019, 19.1% of Greek youths were reported in the NEET category.<sup>199</sup> Greece, with 35.2% of youth (15-24 years old) out of work in 2019<sup>200</sup>, had the highest rate of youth unemployment within the EU-27 group. Improvements in recent years highlight a clear causal link, at least in part, to the financial and economic challenges the country has faced in the last decade.

It is worth noting the differences observed among the 13 Regions across Greece in the NEET and the youth unemployment rates (15-24 years). For example, in 2019 the highest NEET (15-24) rates are observed in Central Greece (28,8%), Western Macedonia (28.6%) and Northern Aegean (28.3%).

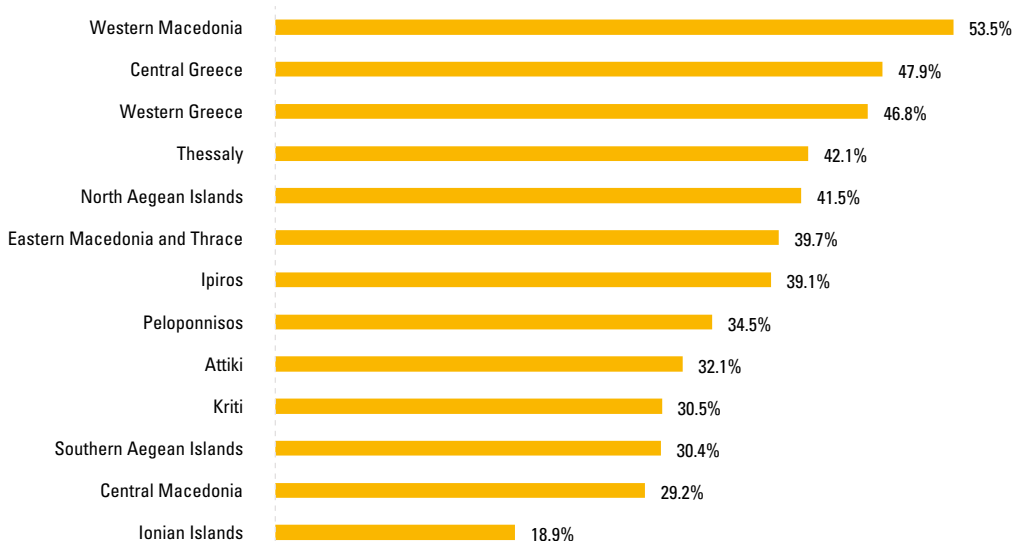
**Figure 7:**  
**NEET (15-24) (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) by Region (2019)**



Source: ELSTAT

In a context of economic recovery after the crisis, employment figures have improved, with employment rates growing by 8.4 percentage points between 2014-2017 (55.8% in 2017). The total population unemployment rate fell to 16.8% in 2020,<sup>201</sup> and the labour market situation for young people has also been improving. From a peak of 60% youth unemployment in mid-2013, it fell to 35.2% in 2019. However, large differences in youth unemployment (15-24) among regions exist which highlights an issue of equity as specific locations such as Western Macedonia, Central Greece and Western Greece seem to have almost half of its youth (15-24) population unemployed.

**Figure 8:**  
**Youth unemployment (15-24) by Region (2019)**



Source: ELSTAT

Legislative developments include the government increase of the minimum wage (by 10.1%) in February 2019 and the elimination of a sub-minimum wage for youth aged under 25 years. However, this can negatively affect specific groups of workers, including the low skilled and youth<sup>202</sup> as well as the most vulnerable group of NEET, which are youth aged 25-29 years old. There is also a gender gap with women 10-15% more likely to be NEET than men.<sup>203</sup> In 2017, the rate of employed men was 15.9% and employed women was 12.4% (among those aged 15-24 years). Geographically, NEET rates between urban and coastal areas have shown a marked difference of up to 25% greater NEET population in the latter.<sup>204</sup>

The level of unemployment for the active population (15 to 74 years) who attained tertiary education (levels 5-8) was 12.2% in 2019 (higher than the EU-28 average 6.4%). Whereas, unemployment among youth who had completed upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3-4) was 19.7% with an EU-28 average of 5.7%. A significant rise in unemployment can be seen among those who do not complete lower secondary education (levels 0-2) or only completed primary school: 21.0 % (compared to the EU-28 average 12.4%).<sup>205</sup> This data indicates that participation in the full education cycle can increase employment prospects.

15% of men and 11% of women aged 15-24 are enrolled in vocational education and training in Greece,<sup>206</sup> slightly lower than the OECD average of 19% for men and 16% for women, however, it is an improvement over recent years which could be attributed to the development of the apprenticeship system. Young people can participate in vocational training up to 29 years old once they have finished secondary education. The level of employment access after completion of vocational training is low (15.7% for continuous vocational education and 21.8% for initial vocational education). Job retention is also very low: an average of 81.5% of those who have found work after vocational training lost it within the following 18 months.<sup>207</sup>

In a 2017 survey conducted by the European Commission,<sup>208</sup> one in every two Greek youths identified education as skills as a top priority for the EU, while 27% identified employment as the top priority. Apart from OAED vocational schools, there is a limited availability of apprenticeship programmes for youth aged 15 to 18, with most targeting youth over 18 years of age. However, in 2020 Microsoft Corp. announced its 'GR for Growth' initiative, a significant development offering 100,000 jobs to people in Greece in the area of digital technology by 2025.<sup>209</sup> Further policy initiatives include 'ReBrain Greece' and media campaigns to reach out and engage the NEET population, and efforts have also started to provide Continuous Vocational Training (including monitoring of training action), as reported by the European Commission in its Youth Guarantee review. Recently a law (4763/2020) was adopted to regulate the National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning. The intention of the law is to strengthen the participation of social partners, to enhance VET attractiveness and to eliminate substantial overlaps at the national, regional and local levels of governance and to achieve optimum satisfaction of the Greek Economy's needs.

## Youth participation

Youth participation is a fundamental right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 12) and is reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through active participation and the development of life skills, knowledge on human rights and citizenship, young people are empowered to play a positive role in their own development as well as in that of their communities. To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools, such as information, education about and access to their civil rights.<sup>210</sup> The European Union, recognizing the importance of young people, has also emphasized the necessity of encouraging young people to participate in the democratic life of Europe.<sup>211</sup>

*“Schools do not promote participation. Therefore, it’s vital to create a strong community or even a digital space for interaction which would be accessible by everyone and link participation with action.”*

**– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021**

In Greece, Law 3443/2006 introduced local youth councils aimed at strengthening the participation of young people above 15 years old in local issues management.<sup>212</sup> Based on essential engagement by youth themselves, the recent EU Youth Strategy provides a framework for policy cooperation around three core areas of action - engage, connect, empower – over the period 2019 to 2027.<sup>213</sup> Relevant stakeholders are, amongst others, the EU Member States, the relevant European Union institutions and other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, local and regional authorities, youth councils, youth organisations, organisations working with young people, youth workers, youth researchers and civil society actors as well as structures of the programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps and their successor programmes.

*“We need to have a voice. There are many times we feel that our parents and teachers don’t listen to us. It feels like they don’t respect us, as they believe we are not mature enough to express our opinion.”*

**– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021**

The engagement of children and young people in civil participation and decision-making is not routinely or comprehensively measured in Greece or across the EU-27 group. Indicatively, based on the European Youth Flash barometer (2017), 46% of young people in Greece reported that they have participated in at least one of the eight activities linked with social and civic participation during the previous 12 months.

The European Flash barometer identified that 24% of youths interviewed had participated in a sports club within the preceding 12 months and 14% in a leisure club or youth organisation. These figures are both slightly lower than EU averages of 29% and 20% respectively.<sup>214</sup> Only 5% of Greek youths interviewed had participated in a political organisation or political party (compared to 7% at EU level), and 14% in a non-governmental organisation (EU: 12%) Youth participation in elections is slightly lower to EU averages, with 38% having participated in local level elections (EU 44%), 21% at regional level (EU 31%) and 44% at national level (EU 43%). Of the 16% who did not vote in an election, three out of four were eligible to do so, while one quarter was not old enough to be able to vote.

*“We say that our voice is heard and many times we express our views in various discussions... but I feel that policies are often predefined and nothing seems to change.”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Despite the existence of legal provisions regarding youth issues, there is no official definition or legal framework for youth work in Greece. Data from Eurostat is not available for recent years (the most recent data relates to 2006) and there is no disaggregated data on participation in sports or cultural activities for the last five years. However, youth work does exist as a social practice; it constitutes an integral part of educational and welfare work and plays a significant role in supporting young people’s safe and healthy transition to adult life. Volunteering is a form of participation based on a sense of solidarity between young people and other groups; volunteering is also a path for participation in other spheres of democratic life, from education to employment.<sup>215</sup> However, there was no national definition of volunteering until the Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth published in 2018. The recent economic crisis has exacerbated the problem of youth integration in the labour market in the EU and Greece has been disproportionately affected, which also might lead to youth who feel less motivated to engage in national initiatives, as they feel their needs and views are not taken into consideration.



**CHAPTER 5.**

**THEMATIC**

**CHAPTERS**

## 5. Thematic chapters

### Roma in Greece

There is limited information on the Roma population in Greece related to the rights of the child, including education, health and nutrition, and living conditions, resulting in Roma children being particularly vulnerable as they often remain out of sight of Greek authorities. In 2017, the Greek state conducted a mapping of Roma accommodation types and found that Roma settlements were present in 354 areas with a total population of 104,210. The accommodation types were classified in three categories based on the living conditions prevalent; 76 accommodation types are camps, 159 are mixed settlements and camps and 119 are poor and deprived neighbourhoods.

The Roma people are considered a vulnerable group within the population (Law 4019/2011, art. 1, par. 4). The Government of Greece has made steps to address the needs of this marginalized population through a National Strategy for their Social Integration of Roma (2011-2020)<sup>216</sup> and the Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Roma population (2017-2021) in line with the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.<sup>217</sup> The current Action Plan is focused on key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing in geographical areas where there are concentrated numbers of the Roma population. The 2001 Integrated National Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma preceded the current Action Plan but substantive implementation was limited and fragmented.<sup>218</sup>

In 2019, the EU adopted a resolution on a Strategic Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies.<sup>219</sup> This was followed by the development of a survey in 2020, led by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, to collect and compare data in eight EU Member States (and two accession countries). The survey will collect information about Roma socio-economic conditions and their experiences of discrimination, harassment and violence, including those motivated by racism, and serve as a baseline for the post-2020 inclusion agenda, with results expected in mid-2021. More recently, the European Commission adopted the [EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030, a new 10-year plan to support Roma in the EU](#), including [a proposal for a Council Recommendation](#). With this framework in place, all EU governments should now start (or continue) to develop strong national Roma strategic frameworks. In that light, Greece has started developing a post-2020 Strategy for Roma populations which will need to be submitted to the European Commission by September 2021.

Residential segregation and forced evictions have plagued the lives of Roma across European countries for decades, if not centuries. The Roma people are often physically distanced and excluded from other parts of Greek society, living in isolated settlements and facing multiple and inter-related segregation, limited access to education, forced evictions and systemic discrimination, leading to poverty and exclusion.<sup>220</sup> There are limited housing programmes and Roma settlements are often run-down and have poor sanitation and hygiene conditions.<sup>221</sup> Among Roma adults, the absence of official identification papers directly affects their capacity to access formal employment. During the last 5 years, a law which allowed 'moving salespersons' to receive official permission to sell goods in the street has been withdrawn. This has directly affected many Roma people and forced them to continue their work illegally in the absence of other employment opportunities.

Roma populations experience more poverty, unemployment, substandard housing, illiteracy and social exclusion compared to majority populations.<sup>222</sup> This results in poorer health and a shorter life

expectancy with lasting impact of exposure to inadequate health and nutrition, neglect, poverty, and abuse. Socio-economic factors and the inadequate inclusion of the Roma population trigger a wide range of deprivations and higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy rate.

The plurality of experiences of Roma childhoods in Greece (i.e. children living in houses, children living in segregated areas, children on the move, children attending formal education, children marginally participating in formal education, children out of school, children's work as exploitation, children's work as vital for the survival of the family, children's work as family-situated knowledge) along with underage marriage and underage pregnancies create multiple forms and levels of children and youth deprivation. Additionally, the fact that most Roma children and youth are being expected to undertake a wide range of age and gender-based responsibilities within the family and community sustained in participatory learning and the production of empirical knowledge hinders their systematic attendance of schooling, particularly at the secondary level of education. In acknowledgement of this, assessing Roma emphasis on family-situated knowledge and participatory modes of learning could orient programming on Roma educational integration and vocational training towards the elaboration of culturally sensitive pedagogical material that accentuates Roma knowledge-skills in meaningful participatory ways.

*“Many Roma children like me, do not have the opportunity to participate in distance learning and stay in the same class due to absences.”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

Systemic segregation in schools constitutes discrimination but the practice continues in Greece and across the region. Despite the obligations under Article 28(1) of the CRC to provide compulsory and free primary education for all, Roma children often have limited access to schools due to the isolated settlements in which they live where routes in and out can become inaccessible during bad weather, preventing school transport and decreasing school attendance.<sup>223</sup> 29% of Roma children in Greece complete primary education and only 2% of Roma youth complete secondary and higher education, with Greece routinely ranking particularly poorly among European countries with Roma populations.<sup>224</sup> The Midterm review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 remarks on progress made across European countries (not disaggregated by country) in access to education, notably as it relates to ECE since 2011 and a decrease in school drop-outs (from 87% to 68%) however, there has also been an increase (from 10% to 15% of Roma students attending school where “all classmates are Roma.”<sup>225</sup> The institution of the “Zones of Educational Priority” introduced in 2010 (Law 3879/2010) is considered as fundamental policy measure for the equal access to education of vulnerable groups, including Roma. In addition, specialized education programmes for Roma children such as the programme “Integration and education for Roma children”, are implemented in collaboration with Greek Universities to strengthen their access and retention in education.

Support to Roma populations is provided through Community Centres established with the law 4368/2016 which provide integrated services in collaboration with the social services of the local government. Within these centres specific services are available to support vulnerable groups; in 2019, 50 such centres for Roma were operational across Greece. Romani populations across Europe face deep-rooted prejudice and structural racism, which has made marginalization of the Roma population “socially acceptable” among major populations.<sup>226</sup> As it relates to social norms, some Roma families do not believe in the importance of continued education for their children beyond the attainment of basic primary competencies in maths and language. While school data on enrolment rates may be available, there is no mechanism to monitor actual attendance and participation. Girls



are less likely than boys to complete their education, as traditional norms continue to inflict domestic roles on girls. Child marriage and arranged marriages continue to take place, to the grave detriment of girls' health and well-being but remain unregistered. School dropouts and early school leaving accompanied by limited government follow-up directly increases children's exposure to child labour, social exclusion, poverty and poor health outcomes.

Past policies on integration have been fragmented and discontinuous, and too generic to respond to the fact that Roma in Greece is not a homogeneous population, with Roma communities having different needs and characteristics. In addition, the lack of participation in the decision-making process at central level by the Roma population themselves has created a sense of mistrust and lack of goodwill between these communities and the state.

Assessing available qualitative data<sup>227</sup> in tandem with quantitative data in target-setting, design and implementation of Roma inclusion programs is of vital importance for acknowledging relevant challenges and opportunities. Particularly relevant towards this direction is the need for better understandings of the Roma family and group organization, processes of family-situated knowledge and learning as well as gender and age-based roles, including children's roles, within the family and the extended kin network. A better understanding of these factors enables the identification in program design of gender and age-based asymmetries both within the family and in wider society that in effect produce multiple asymmetries in equal access of all Roma to inclusion programs and services. Acknowledging the domains in which vulnerable Roma such as children, adolescents, women and elder Roma may become exposed to specific forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence, is equally important as recognizing their potential empowering dynamics in wider constraining contexts which could be meaningful for inclusion and capacity-building programs in domains such as health and nutrition, education, employment, underage marriage and pregnancies, etc.).

Not all Roma speak the same Romani dialect and knowledge of and access to services has been partly overcome by some NGOs providing cultural mediators to improve service delivery for Roma. Furthermore, for those Roma who do not speak Greek, language causes a barrier to parental knowledge of services available, and of their responsibilities as duty bearers to their children, resulting in the exclusion of their children from critical development and learning opportunities. Research has provided information on current regional action plans available in only two regions (Central Macedonia and Peloponnese) but it is not clear to what extent these action plans were implemented or what results were achieved. Although multiple programmes for Roma have been implemented over the last twenty years, there is lack of evidence on their results, monitoring and sustainability.

In Greek society, a number of narratives continue to fuel negative impressions of Roma in the media and the language used in policies and legislation. Many professionals in key health, public services and education roles continue to display a negative stance towards Roma, which decreases their access to, and quality of, services provided to them.<sup>228</sup> In some areas, service delivery is absent entirely, and there are notable gaps in programmes tackling alcohol and drug addiction as well as mental health support. There is a lack of proper information, awareness raising and explaining to the children and parents/caregivers of formal pathways to enable access to basic services (i.e. birth registration (for some cases), social security number issuance, core vaccinations for school enrollment, identification issuance). Roma children and families can frequently face discrimination in the public eye, and in school, and communication does not currently take into full consideration the cultural idiosyncrasies and languages of the Roma population.

Several NGOs working with Roma populations have reported to the researchers in the context of consultations carried out for the purpose of developing the current report that many families have

a poor understanding of the importance of early child health, or education. Poor dietary habits are closely linked to income and available resources: where households are of low income, there is a marked impact on children's nutrition, notably as it relates to Infant & Young Child Feeding (IYCF). Social Services exist at the different levels of administration (municipalities, prefectures, hospitals) but these various access points are not routinely accessible to Roma or are not tailored to their cultural norms and language needs. Relations with the formal health care sector may in some cases be influenced by cultural factors. Negative attitudes among health care workers towards Roma also influence the population's utilisation of health care services.

## Children on the move

Refugee and migrant children have been arriving in Greece for the past decade. In 2015, mainly as a result of the conflict in Syria, a large number of refugee and migrant children entered Greece, driven by hunger, conflict, violence and severe poverty.<sup>229</sup> Among these arrivals, over a third are children while an estimated 85% of child arrivals are with their families or are accompanied by non-family adults. A considerable number of children were separated from a family member during the journey, mainly in Turkey; 7% of Syrians and 10% of Afghans reported such a case to UNHCR in 2016<sup>230</sup>. Among children who arrive with parents and caregivers, the majority are under 14 years old (41% 0-5 years old, 46% 6-15 years old, and 12% 16-17 years old).<sup>231</sup> The unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) account for around 11,6% of all children on the move currently in Greece.<sup>232</sup>

In September 2020, it is estimated that 44,500 refugee and migrant children were present in Greece (56% boys and 44% girls), among them 4,000 are unaccompanied children (92.8% boys and 7.2% girls) with the majority boys between 15 and 17 years old from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria.<sup>233</sup> Among UAC, 37% are out of long term or temporary accommodation, including 176 children in protective custody.

The refugee and migrant population, including children, reside in various accommodation structures across Greece, including both the mainland and islands. These include:

- 32 open accommodation sites in mainland Greece (capacity: 31,184)
- 1 Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in mainland Greece (capacity: 240)
- 4,503 apartments and 21 buildings part of the ESTIA accommodation scheme for asylum seekers (capacity 21,827)
- Helios accommodation and integration apartments run by IOM (capacity 5,000)
- 46 hotels as part of emergency accommodation scheme for families being transferred from the islands/Filoxenia accommodation scheme (5,599 capacity)
- 5 RICs on the islands (13,338 capacity)
- 1 open accommodation site on the island of Lesbos (1,300 capacity)
- 62 UAC shelters (1,637 capacity)
- 15 hotels for emergency accommodation of UAC (1,167 capacity)
- 76 Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments for UAC (304 capacity)

- 14 safe zones within the open accommodation sites for UAC accommodation and care (420 capacity)
- 17 Transit Hubs for Relocation of UAC and vulnerable families with a total capacity of 1,417

Conditions in reception facilities (primarily RICs) remain below international standards, this has been highlighted as a gap by the European Commission in 2016.<sup>234</sup> Asylum applicants still stay on average over five months in RICs on the Greek islands as they await the conclusion of asylum procedures or the confirmation that they are allowed to move onward to the mainland. New arrivals, delays in the asylum procedures, coordination difficulties between responsible authorities, shortage of shelters at the mainland and the resistance of local communities all cause barriers, compounded by political reluctance to deal with such conflicts.

In September 2020, the Moria RIC in Lesvos was destroyed by a number of fires that broke out, leaving 12,000 people homeless; among them were more than 4,000 children. Following this incident, 3,482 asylum seekers (including 752 UAC) were transferred either to available accommodation places in the mainland or to other European Member States through the voluntary relocation scheme. To allocate the remaining former RIC population, a new temporary emergency RIC site was built however, it still suffers from poor hygiene, poor infrastructure and is overcrowded, while efforts are underway by the authorities and partners to improve WASH and shelter.

## Education

According to Greek law, recognized minor refugees and asylum seekers are ensured access to education.<sup>235</sup> The current enrolment of refugee and migrant children in formal education is less than half (42%) of the school-age population with higher numbers (73%) for children residing in urban accommodation and lower (28%) for those in emergency hotels; the enrolment rate is negligible (2%) for children residing in RICs.<sup>236</sup>

Barriers to education for refugee and migrant children are multi-faceted and include an insufficient number of places in local schools, children awaiting documentation and delays in issuing Health Coverage Number (PAAYPA, see relevant Health section), and lack of immunization. Delayed employment of teachers in DYEP and reception classes as well as delays in transportation provision for children residing in Open Accommodation Sites also hinders enrollment in public schools. Since March 2020, access to education has been impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, including periods of school closure, public health guidelines (e.g. social distancing), and movement restrictions both in Open Accommodation Sites and urban areas. Moreover, many kindergartens of the MoE inside Open Accommodation Sites are used at times as quarantine space when their operation is suspended according to the national legislation regarding the operation of educational structures in response to COVID-19.

*“I have been living in Greece for two years now and I have not yet been in school.”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

There is no mandatory provision of interpretation in Greek schools and many schools are, therefore, not supported by interpreters to help facilitate communication between refugee and migrant students, their parents, and school staff. Schools lack other supportive mechanisms including social welfare professionals, training for teachers on intercultural education, and tailored educational material for non-Greek students. The number of reception classes for refugees and migrants as well as the number of educators who provide parallel support in the classroom remain low and there is

minimal support for migrant and refugee adolescents specifically, who in many cases experience difficulties in enrolling and remaining in school.

## Health

Law 4368/2016 ensures free access to public health services for anyone in Greece, including the refugee and migrant population. In addition, asylum seekers are provided a Foreigner's Temporary Insurance and Health Coverage Number (PAAYPA),<sup>237</sup> which is issued together with the asylum seeker's card. If the decision of the asylum is negative, the PAAYPA number is cancelled.

Despite the legal provisions, there are considerable barriers for asylum seekers to access health services, both in large urban cities and rural areas as well as on the islands. The concentration of children on the move in the central areas of Athens and Thessaloniki has overloaded health services, including the two Children's Hospitals in Athens which already suffer from overcrowding and long delays.

The PAAYPA is usually issued with a delay, especially in the RICs, due to the overburdened asylum system impacting those with urgent healthcare needs. Access to health care in the RICs and surrounding areas remains difficult and often delayed due to the shortage of health professionals (including pediatricians). In addition to medical units run by EODY within RICs and referrals to public hospitals, the MoMA is taking further action to address these issues such as, ensuring an adequate number of interpreters, further decongesting RICs through transfers to the mainland, supporting relocation programmes to other EU Member States, and cooperating with the Ministry of Health to cover the needs of medical staff in RIS facilities. The healthcare situation in the island RICs is exacerbated by the overall shortage of health professionals at public health institutions on the islands.

A positive development over the last few years is the provision of primary-health care services by state actors (EODY, Greek Ministry of Defense through the armed forces) and in some cases by NGOs in all Open Accommodation Sites and RICs across Greece. At the same time, municipal health services are seriously understaffed and cannot respond to the increasing numbers of vulnerable children in need of services. Availability of interpretation and cultural mediation in public health services remains challenging, although NGOs are providing interpretation services for migrant and refugee population in public hospitals.

The limited number of child-specific mental health centres and clinics in Greece affects all children including vulnerable children on the move most at risk such as unaccompanied children. It has been found that around 75% of the UASC have mild, moderate or severe mental health problems, with half of them related to aggressive and violent behavior and bullying, while 8% of UASC were found to have substance abuse issues.<sup>238</sup> UASC sheltered by NGOs are provided with psychosocial support only for mild mental health issues. In addition, the lack of trained interpreters in the existing mental health structures make accessing the mental health system by children on the move even more difficult.

Vaccination of children on the move has been covered at a rate of 80%, according to the National Action Plan for Public Health (2019-2022) and with the support of UN Agencies (UNICEF, WHO) and the European Commission under overall leadership of the Ministry of Health. However, immunization needs for refugee and migrant children are not adequately addressed by national vaccine programmes. Children without an AMKA or PAAYPA number face difficulties in accessing basic vaccines, which is a requirement for children to be enrolled in public school. Particularly vulnerable among this group are unaccompanied children in Greece.<sup>239</sup> Systematic medical history tracking is needed in order to provide vulnerable individuals with medical records regardless of their movement

among different types of accommodation facilities. A final challenge for children on the move relates to the lack of relevant documentation translated into their mother tongue language.

## Protection

Greece's legal system on asylum is based on the Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol outlining the fundamental principle of non-refoulement and requirement to provide asylum to those who meet the persecution criteria therein. As a Member State of the European Union (EU) and the Schengen area, Greece also adheres to the directives and regulations of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the Schengen Borders Code, which requires that external borders be secured. Greece is also obliged to respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which recognizes the right to asylum.

The reformed Asylum Service, including an Appeals Committee and a First Reception Service were introduced in 2011 by Law 3907/2011. Those changes significantly improved asylum approval rates, from nearly null or 1% to between 10% and 30% in 2015.<sup>240</sup> Previously, Greece was placed at the lowest percentage of positive asylum decisions in Europe in 2008 (around 1%).<sup>241</sup> In 2011, the European Court of Human Rights<sup>242</sup> and the EU Court of Justice<sup>243</sup> found that Greece's asylum system suffers from "systemic deficiencies," including lack of reception centres and poor detention conditions. In February 2020, the Asylum Service reported that since 2013, 71,296 children from 0 to 13 years and 26,675 from 14 to 17 years had applied for asylum. Among all children on the move who applied for asylum, 12,415 were UAC. Of those UAC who applied for asylum, 91% were males, and 8% were under 13 years of age.<sup>244</sup> Most UAC girls came from Syria (41%) and Afghanistan (17%), while boys were from Pakistan (36%) and Afghanistan (28%).<sup>245</sup> Among asylum decisions on first instance issued from 2013 to February 2020, 28.5% of UAC received refugee status at first instance decision, while 63.3% of UAC asylum applications were rejected and 8.1% received subsidiary protection<sup>246</sup>.

The family unit of those who are recognized refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is protected by law and acquire the same status as the applicant.<sup>247</sup> Those who have been recognized as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are granted a residence permit, alongside their family members, for three years, which is renewable, except for cases where they pose a threat to national security or public safety.

Nationally, the governance of child protection is fragmented and coordination between child protection authorities remains a challenge. In particular, accountabilities concerning children on the move are scattered among different ministries and directorates resulting in coordination, operational and data collection gaps. To respond to the needs of the influx of migratory flows into Greece since 2015, including targeted programmes and funding streams, a parallel protection system was created delinked from the national system. UN Agencies, NGOs and IOs provided basic protection services, through external project-based funding. In many instances at locations and structures specifically developed to provide services to children on the move, away from local communities, with personnel specifically employed and trained to work with this population. Although such a response might have been a necessary to respond to the immediate needs of the refugee and migrant children arriving in Greece, this parallel system continues to function.

Although some safety measures have been taken (such as the definition of child-dedicated areas in the RICs and in Open Accommodation sites) and there are underway efforts by the MoMA such as the regulation of entrance to mainland Open Accommodation Sites to enhance security, displaced children remain extremely vulnerable. Overcrowded facilities, with limited security and safety measures increase the protection and GBV risks for children and their families, as well as single mothers.

### Unaccompanied children

Although UASC are meant to be transferred from the RICs to the mainland immediately after being certified as minors, there are insufficient places in mainland shelters resulting in delays. Mainland accommodation sites where families with children are hosted and urban shelters hosting UASC are open facilities and children are free to move around the community. In addition, in some mainland accommodation sites there is a specialized protection team for each safe area-zone which monitors closely of the UAC and their safety.

With the exception of small-sized shelters with capacity of between 15 to 25 places and the most preferable for adequate individual care small scale homes with 4 places in each individual house (e.g. SIL project<sup>248</sup>) for UASC, in RICs and Safe Zones the quality of basic care is below acceptable standards: poor living conditions and poor hygiene, lack of privacy, lack of adequately trained personnel to support and guide the UASC, personnel changes constantly and professional burn-out has been repetitively reported. The Emergency Hotels are generally well-maintained and provide acceptable living conditions; however, privacy and security issues are a concern. In small-sized shelters, although basic care is acceptable, the UASC are free to move in the surroundings of the shelter with no or poor supervision, exposed to any form of violence and exploitation. UASC free movement without adequate supervision has also been connected to the serious issue of practicing “survival sex,” especially in urban areas<sup>249</sup>. In the RICs (where safe areas for UAC are established) and Safe Zones, serious protection issues still remain as UASC often live alongside with non-relative adults, without appropriate supervision and/or patrolling all hours of the day.

UASC hosted in structures away from urban areas have difficulty to access education, health and mental health services and institutionalized care overall does not adequately provide for the lack of parental care. The high concentration of UASCs in large size institutions create barriers to social integration and conditions for ‘ghettoing’ the UASCs. Recently a community-based practice, the Supported Independent Living (SIL), is being developed, The SIL scheme currently offers 188 places (with a further 72 places planned) However SILs are now running under the AMIF fund thus ensuring further sustainability and potential scale up.

Unaccompanied children who are homeless or living in precarious conditions do not receive appropriate care and support and are at great risk of violence and exploitation. Those children are not supported mainly due to lack of outreach activities, which are usually applied by NGOs in a sporadic manner and project-funded, the lack of trained personnel in social welfare, health and justice public services where those children may appear to get services. During 2020, a prioritization exercise was initiated by the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in the context of which UASC living in insecure housing conditions, together with minors living in RICs and children in protective custody were prioritized in the relocation scheme.

A new guardianship system is planned but not been implemented yet, therefore juvenile prosecutors are by law the guardians of UASC. However, the limited number of prosecutors and the large number of UASCs makes the current guardianship system practically inexistent. In addition, it has been observed that the age assessment procedures were inconsistently implemented among regions of the country exposing a large number of UASC to further risks, as most of them enter Greece without official documentation. The inconsistent implementation of age assessment, or the failure to implement any age assessment, bears severe consequences for many UASC because in such cases minors are treated by the state equal to adults, and consequently child’s rights fail to be ensured. Age assessment often fails due to lack of trained human resources and lack of equipment available to the regions where UASCs are hosted. But a new Joint Ministerial Decision (9889/2020) (B 3390) regarding the age assessment procedure for UASMs has been introduced aiming to harmonize the process and the Special Secretary is collaborating closely with competent actors

to ensure harmonization at operational level. Fast-track asylum procedures may also impede the full implementation of age assessment procedures as those are defined by the recent Ministerial Decision number 9889 of the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020. Furthermore, return procedures to origin countries often fail to meet all safeguards towards ensuring the best interest of the child.

Specifically, in what concerns UASC, recent positive developments are being observed. The Greek State recognized that the population of UASC present differentiated needs and necessitate special care. Thus, in February 2020, a more centralized protection system for unaccompanied minors was developed, and a Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minor was established by the Presidential Degree 18/2020. It operates according to Articles 35 and 42 of the Law 4622/2019 on the Executive State and reports directly to the Minister of Migration and Asylum. The mission of the Secretary is to develop, implement and supervise the National Strategy for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in Greece. It is the competent national authority for the protection of unaccompanied minors and is designated to coordinate and supervise all actions taken by other competent authorities, agencies or organizations regarding unaccompanied minors. The Special Secretariat also initiates and implements policies and actions to ensure the protection and well-being of third-country nationals and stateless individuals, who are unaccompanied or separated minors in Greek territory. Its responsibilities are set out in articles 32 and 60 of Law 4636/2019, as amended.

Although important legislative and structural steps towards resolving the issues arising from the parallel protection system to (including UASC) in the national child protection system have been made, the implementation of important measures such as the new Guardianship system and the Foster Care Registry (which by Law will include UASCs) have either paused or delayed, respectively. Migration risks sometimes are different and affect differently boys and girls; gender-based violence is common in the context of migration. Currently, there are seven shelters exclusively for UASC girls, and specialized psychosocial and integration support measures have to be ensured to keep young unaccompanied girls safe. The UASC below 14 years of age are also in need for specialized and adequate care, adjusted to the needs of their developmental stage

### **Family reunification and the voluntary relocation scheme for UAC**

Refugees who apply for family reunification face serious obstacles which render the effective exercise of the right to family reunification extremely challenging in practice. Lengthy procedures, administrative obstacles as regards the issuance of visas even in cases where the application for family reunification has been accepted, the requirement of documents which are difficult to obtain by refugees, and lack of information on the possibility of family reunification, the three-month deadline and the available remedies are reported among others. Yet, 43% of Syrian children have mentioned family reunification as one of the main reasons for choosing a destination country.<sup>250</sup>

With regards to UASC, the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration according to Article 60(3) of Law 4636/2019 (G.G. A' 169) is in charge of coordinating the actions required to relocate minors to other Member States as part of multilateral agreements. Under such mandate, the Special Secretary coordinated and implemented in collaboration with other actors, UN agencies, European Commission and national actors a voluntary relocation scheme for UAC from Greece; priority was given to minors that were based in RICs in border areas, in protective custody and reported as homeless/living in precarious conditions. Regarding the results of the relocation scheme until now:

- From 15.4.2020 until 31.12.2020, 537 UAC were relocated from Greece to 9 EU states (Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Switzerland)
- From 24.7.2020 until 31.12.2020, 1,024 persons have been relocated to Germany from which 612

were children suffering from serious health problems and their families. This programme has been completed.

- Finally, during September 2020, 275 persons (adults and families) have been relocated to France.

Thus, in total 1,876 persons have been relocated from Greece under this scheme.

Taking into consideration the results as presented above, the need of establishing a sustainable relocation mechanism for unaccompanied children from Greece and ensure the family unity within EU as long as a relative who can take care of the minor's needs is based in another EU country should be recognised. Since the influx of unaccompanied minors entering the Greek territory is not stable and easily predictable and currently a great effort is taking place to ensure a sustainable protective ecosystem for all unaccompanied children in Greece, the support on behalf of the other member states is of paramount importance to ensure durable solutions for the unaccompanied children in Greece and in Europe.

## Children with disabilities

In general, there are limited statistics and disaggregated data on children with disabilities in Greece, including on key topics related to the rights of the child such as, welfare and protection, education, and living conditions. Consequently, children with disabilities often remain out of sight of Greek authorities and face systemic and social discrimination while social stereotypes and prejudices persist in Greek society.

National legislation and policies exist and protect, to a certain extent, children with disabilities but are not fully implemented. Greece ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol in 2012 through Law 4074/2012. As a signatory to the CRPD, the government has reported on its implementation, and, has also recently submitted a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in preparation of its forthcoming session in 2021, in which children with disabilities and special education needs are discussed (pertaining to Article 23 of the CRC). In addition, available national resources do not correspond to the needs set out in this legislation.

Families continue to lack adequate support to care for children with disabilities<sup>251</sup> and can lead to exclusion from society the placing of the child in foster care or being abandoned. As previously mentioned under 'Right to Protection', there is no data on how many of the 1,689 children currently residing in large-scale institutional care, inappropriate for all children's optimum development, are with disabilities.

Article 31 of the CRPD obliges Member States to 'collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the Convention.'<sup>252</sup> However, there is a general insufficiency of statistics and disaggregated data on the number of children with disabilities.<sup>253</sup> The lack of data based on age, gender, disability or region of origin renders it difficult to draw conclusions on the of the number of children with different types of disabilities, their location and their specific needs in order to provide adequate programmes and services.

Children with disabilities require special care and extended support based on both the child's specific needs and the circumstances of the parents or caregiver<sup>254</sup>, without which the child is vulnerable to neglect, abandonment and institutionalization. The Parallel Report on the UNCRC by the Greek Ombudsperson<sup>255</sup> highlights a number of specific barriers to the full enactment of the



rights of children with disabilities. Even though there is a solid legal framework (3699/2008), there is a general lack of adapted services provided for children with disabilities which serve to prevent their full inclusion and engagement both as children and in the future as adults. As it relates to health, there is a lack of qualified specialized services (especially for those with severe disabilities and their families). Children with disabilities face constraints in accessing diagnosis with historically long waiting periods. The Centers Educational Support and Counseling (KESY) have an extended role including support to schools for the inclusion of children with disabilities and the training of school staff. However, due to constrained resources, their role is limited to the evaluation of individual cases. There are also insufficient numbers of child specialist doctors such as child neurologists and child psychiatrists. Specialist treatment under the EOPYY is not adequate to cover all the needs of children with disabilities and regulation is lacking for the provision of special therapies in private centers.

*“I have learning difficulties, there was no one to understand me and support me. We need to be equally heard and respected.”*

*– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

In line with inclusive principles for all children to attend mainstream school, 75,680 children who were recognised as requiring a special needs education in 2017/2018, attended mainstream school and were provided with specific support. In addition, 10,883 children were offered places in special schools recognised by the Ministry of Education.<sup>256</sup> Based on a lack of nationwide data, it is not fully clear how many children with disabilities there are and how many of them are out of school, despite the latest efforts by MoE to collect data on children with disabilities attending formal education schools. Despite positive changes that have been promoted through announced policies, systemic problems continue in relation to the organization, the resources, human resources, teaching programmes and methods, educational material as well as perceptions and practices in the education of children with disabilities. There are no co-education programmes between general and special schools despite the inclusion of these provisions in law 4368/2016. A positive development is that within 2020 schools have been supported with 4,500 permanent appointments of special education teachers and staff. Special educational measures are provided in schools through integration classes and parallel support, on an individual basis, or in separate special schools. Issues pertaining to existing structures are presently being revisited by MoE in the context of codifying and evaluating the national legislation pertaining to students with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

Although School Units of Special Education have special educational staff and also the Centers of Educational and Advisory Support ( .S. ) exist as relevant structures, there is a lack of sufficient services in occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy, psychological support at school and community level, and the adaptation of educational material suitable to a child with disabilities is not routinely developed.

Social integration for children with disabilities is an ongoing challenge, particularly as it relates to early childhood education. In addition, the lack of adequate human resources in nurseries and kindergartens is the usual reason cited for excluding children with disabilities.

Physical access for children with disabilities remains an issue in public spaces in cities and in schools. Where specific construction of access is required, it is not routinely undertaken. It is unclear if this is related to costs or rather the result of bureaucracy where administrative hold-ups prevent permission being granted. While legislative measures have been established to enable the possibility

of admission to higher education institutions, barriers remain and further measures are required to ensure substantive and equal enjoyment of the right to education, such as transportation and accessibility to infrastructure (rooms, libraries, workshops). Ensuring equitable access to education is a priority of the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities but also of the Strategic Action Plan for the Equitable Access of Individuals with Disabilities to Education. There is a lack of connection of schools with services in the community. With few exceptions such as the “Apprenticeship Class”, there are very limited structures and programmes for the lifelong learning of children with disabilities, in particular in terms of functionality, self-care and daily living.

Social norms in Greek society pose further barriers to the acceptance of children with disabilities. Despite the significant progress made in the realm of raising awareness within society about issues of accepting diversity and combatting social prejudice, stereotypes and prejudices are deemed pervasive in Greek society, and they contribute negatively to the achievement of the full acquisition of rights for all. Children with disabilities are perceived as a ‘special’ pathological issue and often face stigmatization. To overcome this, it is necessary to raise awareness and form new perceptions about integration of students with disabilities.

## Addressing violence against women

Gender-based violence is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. UNICEF’s efforts to respond to gender-based violence (GBV) are central to the agency’s mandate for the protection, health and well-being of children and women, including young women up to 29 years old. Specifically, “GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private”<sup>257</sup>.

The current UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2018 – 2021 focuses on the promotion of equality for girls and boys from birth through adolescence by addressing gender-specific discrimination and disadvantages that typically affect girls the most, but can also affect boys, as well as the promotion of gender equality in care and support of women and children<sup>258</sup>. For the purposes of the present situation analysis, this chapter will focus on violence against adult women, including mothers, as violence against children – girls and boys – is addressed under Chapter 5 “Right to Protection”.

Greek Law 3500/2006 constitutes the main legal instrument to combat domestic violence, making special reference to violence against women and minors; this Law was modified with the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, widely known as the “Istanbul Convention”, “to foresee application of this Law for partners in cohabitation agreement and to the extended family of both partners. On April 2018, Greece ratified the Istanbul Convention with Law 4351/2018. This Convention further amplifies women’s rights already within the legislative framework, including 4478/2017 (Part IV) defining minimum standards for the protection and care of victims of crime, including specific measures for minors. The Istanbul Convention is based on four pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and coordination. Signatories are obliged to undertake a range of efforts to enhance women’s rights including encouraging the media and private sector in setting standards that enhance respectful gender roles; educate citizens on non-violence and gender equality; challenge gender stereotypes; promote women’s empowerment; establish programs for perpetrators and encourage men and boys to engage actively in the prevention of violence. Finally, it foresees the training of professionals to recognize and respond to victims of violence. In addition, the Convention details forced marriage as a form of human trafficking and enhances the penal code for crimes against women (genital mutilation,

stalking, and honor crimes). In March 2019, the Law 4604/2019 of the Ministry of Interior, entitled “Promoting fundamentally gender equality, preventing and combating gender-based violence” (Part A, articles 1-30) was published. It foresees measures for the mainstreaming of gender equality across all State’s policy sectors, formalizes the existence of the Network of permanent structures across the country for the prevention and fight of violence against women, foresees the development of “Equality Plans” by State and private stakeholders and the awarding of “Equality Awards” for the implementation of policies of equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men in work environments, among others.

In 2013, Greece concluded the transposition of the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims with the Law 4198/2013 (215/A /2013); this Law established the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which coordinates all relevant States’ policies and activities for the prevention and fight against human trafficking and for the protection of the victims of trafficking in human beings. On this same year, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was ratified with the Law 4216/2013 (266/A /2013).

### **Governance for the prevention and fight of violence against women and the protection of its victims and coordinating mechanisms**

The General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) is the State Authority responsible to plan, implement and monitor the implementation of policies for gender equality in all fields of social, political and financial life in Greece. According to Law 4606/2019, the GSFPGE has the mandate to supervise the 62 structures of the National Network (e.g. counselling centers, safe shelters) for the prevention and fight against violence inflicted to women, and all forms of discrimination against women. Of the 62 Network’s structures, the 42 are Counseling Centers; of those, 14 operate under KETHI and the other 27 operate under the responsibility of the respective Municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for running 18 out of the 20 safe shelters for women victims of violence, and EKKKA runs another two safe shelters (Athens, Thessaloniki) for survivors of violence against women. The National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKKA) is supervised by the MoLSA and is responsible to coordinate the network of psychosocial services to individuals, families and communities at extreme risk and/or emergency situations. EKKKA is also responsible to manage the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims and presumed victims of human trafficking (Ministerial Decision 30840/20.9.2016), which is supervised by the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NRM operates as a hub for coordinated action and partnership building, among all actors involved in combating human trafficking. The Department of Domestic Violence of the Hellenic Police, which was established with the P.D. 37/2019, includes 73 branches countrywide, each staffed with two officers. The Directorate of Equal Treatment established in the Office of the Ombudsperson is responsible to monitor and promote the principle of equal treatment for all citizens and fight against any form of discrimination. The National Council for Gender Equality is an advisory board attached to the GSFPGE and is responsible to carry out consultations with all stakeholders at local, municipal, regional level, with the civil society and the private sector. It also evaluates the policies on gender equality. In addition, each Regional Authority has established a Regional Equality Committee and an Independent Equality Office. At Municipal level, Municipal Equality Committees have been established, as well as Departments for Social Policy and Gender Equality Services. Important role on the monitoring of the implementation of gender equality policies and the dissemination of relevant statistical data plays the Observatory of Gender Equality established by the GSFPGE. Important role to monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of human rights in Greece, although not specifically focusing on monitoring and eliminating discrimination, plays the National Commission for Human Rights.

### Recognized forms of violence against women

The recognized forms of violence against women are gender-based violence, domestic violence, femicide, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, rape, physical violence, psychological violence, trafficking in human beings, female genital mutilation, honor crimes, enforcement into marriage, enforced sterilization, financial violence, and recurrent harassment (other than sexual). In addition, new forms of violence against women include cyberbullying which by itself may include online monitoring, online harassment, and non-consensual pornography.

*“I would like my sexual identity to be accepted and respected.”*

– *Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021*

### Gender-based violence in numbers

Based on data aggregated from the databases maintained by the Hellenic Society of Local Development and Local Government (EETAA) and National SOS Helpline 24/7 15900, the GSFPGE in the 1<sup>st</sup> National Report on Violence Against Women, reported<sup>259</sup>, that for the period 1/11/2019 – 31/10/2020, 4,872 women were supported by the counselling centers of the National Network of structures for the prevention and fight against violence inflicted to women and the protection of its victims. Of those women, 84% requested services due to domestic violence, 2% due to rape and another 2% due to sexual harassment. In 56% of the cases the perpetrator was the current or ex-husband, in 13% the intimate partner and in another 12% a family member. Although beneficiaries came from all age-bands, the majority (29%) was from 36 to 45 years, while 19% was from 26 to 35, 19% from 46 to 55, 9% below 25 and 8% above 60 years of age (no age information for 11% of the beneficiaries). The majority (22%) had completed secondary education, 14% tertiary education and 12% post-secondary education. The 45% was unemployed and 34% were employed. The 77% had Greek Nationality, 14% were migrants residing in Greece, and 3% were other EU-countries' nationals. From the total, 71 women required interpretation to benefit from services; the total number of sessions that took place with interpretation were 263. Interestingly, only 11% of those women were informed for the available services through the web; most were informed by other supportive services (30%) and the National SOS Helpline 15900 (21%). From the 4,872 women, the 6% (N = 292) requested hospitality to a safe shelter.

For the period 1/11/2019 – 31/10/2020, according to this same GSFPGE's report<sup>260</sup>, 269 women and 270 children were hosted in safe shelters around the country; of those, 96 women and 117 children were refugees; however, there is no data on whether the children accommodated together with their mother in the shelters are also victims of violence, or whether they present any special need due to disability or other vulnerabilities. The 69% of the women were unemployed and only 9% employed. The most common reason for being hosted in a safe shelter was domestic violence (79%), followed by rape (6%), sexual harassment (3%), and human trafficking (2%); for 9% of the women no information on reason for hospitality was available. Many women preferred to stay with friends and family, while maintaining contact with the Network's professionals.

Concerning the phone calls received by the National SOS Helpline 24/7 15900 for the period 1/11/2019 – 31/10/2020, the total number that was related to incidences of violence against women was 6,042. Of those, 68% were made by beneficiaries themselves, and 32% by third persons (usually friends, family, and neighbors). The 73% of the women who called the helpline had Greek nationality. Most phone calls were made from the Regions of Attica (45%) and Central Macedonia (11%). Most women denounced domestic violence (88%), while the most common forms of domestic violence referred were: psychological violence (33,5%), verbal violence (29,6%), physical

violence (28,6%), financial violence (5,4%) and sexual violence (1,3%). The 52% of the women were married; only in 1% of the cases the perpetrator was a person unknown to the victim. It should be noted that 62% of the women who denounced violence were mothers and 1% were pregnant.

Based on Hellenic Police's statistics, there has been sharp increase equal to 49% for filled complaints of domestic violence, from 2012 to 2017<sup>261</sup>. In 2019, 4171 women filed a complaint for domestic violence to Police (9,3% increase from 2018), and femicides by a family member accounted for 42,1% of homicides against women<sup>262</sup>. On the other hand, from 2016 to 2019, the Greek Authority for Compensation received only 6 requests due to violence against women, but none of these cases was compensated<sup>263</sup>.

In 2019, the National Center for Social Solidarity reported<sup>264</sup> that among the 154 certified and suspected victims of human trafficking identified by State Authorities, civil society and international organizations, a hundred and twenty (120) were women and girls, twenty-eight (28) men, two (2) transgender and boys, and in six (6) cases the gender of the victim was not specified. It is obvious that women constitute the majority of the adult victims, and girls the majority of child victims. Moreover, eleven (11) women were pregnant at the time of the referral, and twenty-one (21) were accompanied by their children. The vast majority of trafficking victims reported to NRM in 2019 were adult women, victims of sexual exploitation (N = 81). It should be noted that two (2) of the victims of sexual exploitation, recorded as of male biological sex, were transgender. The most common form of girls exploitation was sexual exploitation (N = 11) and forced begging (N = 15); there was one case of a girl being exploited through enforcement to marriage, and another through labor exploitation.

In the context of the mixed migration flows arriving in Greece since 2015, many migrant and refugee women have been identified as survivors of violence. For example, the international NGO Medecins Sans Frontières reported that between September 2017 and January 2018 attended to 215 survivors of sexual violence who presented for care in the Organization's outpatient clinic in Moria, or in the Mytiline mental health clinic. Among the 215 cases, 155 (72%) were women and 60 (28%) were men. The majority of incidents reported (94%) were cases of rape; 174 (81%) of survivors were from Africa and 185 (86%) of the incidents occurred over a month before presentation. Half the incidents (118) occurred in transit, mainly in Turkey, and 76 (35%) in the country of origin; 10 cases (5%) occurred on Lesbos. The perpetrator was known to the survivor in 23% of the cases<sup>265</sup>. Furthermore, it has been found that 25% to 42% of girls who originate from countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced are at risk to fall victims of FGM in Greece<sup>266</sup>.

### **Barriers and future challenges**

Greece has developed a solid legal and institutional framework to prevent and fight violence against women; however, an international instrument important for the protection of women from violence and discrimination that has not been ratified yet is the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families<sup>267</sup>. Greece has to focus more on the implementation and monitoring of established Laws and policies, along with ensuring adequate resourcing<sup>268</sup>. During a mission in Greece on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, the OHCHR heard by an interlocutor that "Our legislative framework is good, but when it comes to the application of the law we face serious challenges due to the obstacles of the old mindset and the old practices"<sup>269</sup>. It is, also, worth mentioning that there is no dedicated independent national institution to monitor and fight violence and discrimination against women.

Although important steps have been made towards the collection of systematic data on discrimination and violence against women, some barriers still need to be overcome. The Observatory for Gender Equality of the GSFPGE, which is responsible for monitoring article 11 of the "Istanbul Convention" that refers to the coordination of data collection and dissemination of data

on violence against women, uses the indicators proposed by EIGE and GREVIO's questionnaire to organize national data on violence against women and to monitor the phenomenon and the policies to combat it. The collection of data for some of those indicators is still incomplete and coordination among relevant Authorities is necessary to be achieved. UNICEF supports the GSFPGE on data collection for the purpose of reporting against the GREVIO questionnaire which should be ready early next year. However, towards this end, it is important that all Prosecution of First Instance Offices provide data on cases of violence against women; according to the yearly report of GSFPGE<sup>270</sup> some Offices didn't contribute with data.

Patriarchal beliefs and attitudes are still deeply rooted in the Greek society. Although Law 4604 foresees that the State shall combat gender stereotypes, and despite Greece's very low score in the Gender Equality Index of the EIGE especially in relation to women being in public positions of power, this still remains an issue as women are underrepresented both in the government (10%) and Parliament (21%). Furthermore, it has been recognized that education and the media are strong game-changers in combating gender stereotypes; however, human rights education and gender-based violence awareness raising have not been included in the public school system, and the media do not contribute sufficiently to promote equality and fight against gender stereotypes. Instead, the Network for the Registration of Racist Violence has reported that the media have produced aggressive public narratives against vulnerable minorities, including migrant and refugee women<sup>271</sup>.

Proactive and systematic action towards decreasing social inequalities for women is intrinsically related to eliminating violence and discrimination against women. As it was shown above, the National SOS Helpline 15900 received 441 (5,4% of the total) denouncements for financial violence, while 69% of the women who were hosted in safe shelters due to violence were unemployed. But women's employment outcomes continue to be disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis, austerity measures and the pandemic due to COVID 19, as it is demonstrated by the fact that during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2020, 19.9% of the women are unemployed comparing to 14.1% of men<sup>272</sup>. More specifically, the highest unemployment rates are observed among women, persons aged 20 - 24 years, in the Region of Southern Aegean, and persons that have completed less than primary education<sup>273</sup>. In addition, the undeclared work in Greece has been estimated to be equivalent of 24% of GDP, which puts Greece among the countries with one of the largest undeclared economies in Europe. Informal forms of work include domestic work, cleaning, care for elderly and children, tutoring for students, employment in the hospitality sector, all sectors which have a higher share of female workers. The informal sector appears to be an under-studied sector requiring further attention by the Government<sup>274</sup>. Further barriers for women to enter the workforce is the insufficient public childcare<sup>275</sup>.

Securing funding for the National Network of 62 structures that provides services to women victims of violence and includes 14 counselling centers, safe shelters in various Regions of the country and the National SOS Helpline 15900, until the year 2023 is paramount for the protection and empowerment of women victims of violence. But the need to increase the places in safe shelters is urgent, as it is demonstrated in the report published by the GSFPGE<sup>276</sup>: out of 4872 women who were provided services by the Network's counselling centers, the 6% (N = 292) required hospitality to a safe shelter. Based on this same report, the safe shelters accommodated, during November 2019 to October 2020, 269 women and 270 children. Thus, it seems that the real needs were not covered by the existing places in safe shelters, and specifically the shelters located at Athens and Thessaloniki do not cover the needs of those two large urban centers – as many women prefer not to be transferred in other parts of the country mostly due to their supportive networks being in those two cities. In addition, front-line professionals do not receive specialized training on the identification of victims of gender-based violence, nor on referral pathways and on the procedures that have to be followed to achieve a safe referral for a victim of gender-based violence.

As it was mentioned above, in 2019, it was found that 62% of the self-reported female victims of domestic violence were mothers, as they were 21 female victims of human trafficking identified during 2019; another 11 female victims of human trafficking were pregnant. But, there are no official data on the needs of children of violence survivors and on intergenerational violence, while there are not any services addressing specifically this population.

Some forms of violence against women have not been studied sufficiently yet and there are no official data on their prevalence, populations who are at greatest risk and their needs. Such examples are cyber violence against women and girls; female genital mutilation; and domestic servitude. In addition, there are vulnerable groups of women who have not been studied to shed light to their life conditions and needs in order to develop evidence-based policies for their empowerment and protection from social exclusion and violence, such as disabled women, women with chronic diseases, women with mental health problems and problems with substance abuse and homeless women; many of them are mothers. Finally, special attention and care should be given to women belonging to strongly patriarchal communities such as Roma communities and the Muslim communities of Thrace, as well as to migrant and refugee women.

As gender-specific discrimination and disadvantages may also affect boys<sup>277</sup>, it should be noted that there is no data on boys and men victims of gender-based violence in Greece, as well as there is lack of supportive programs and safe shelters for men and boys, as well as for LGBTQi individuals, victims of gender-based violence. Also, there is lack of therapeutic programs for men and women perpetrators of gender-based violence, with the exception of the programs run by the National Center for Social Solidarity that provide a small number of places to two therapeutic programs for men perpetrators of gender-based violence in Athens and Thessaloniki. In addition, sensitization workshops aiming at the prevention of gender-based violence and promotion of gender equality by addressing children and adolescents are also inexistent.

## Covid-19 impact

UNICEF adverts that children are hit hard by the pandemic provoked by the virus COVID-19 and are adversely affected either by the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic or by the mitigation measures that may inadvertently do more harm than good<sup>278</sup>.

The pandemic affects children and their families in a systemic manner. Everyday services essential for the safety and well-being of children and families – from ante-natal care for pregnant women to child protection and education – have been paused or are limited and malfunctioning, as entire populations go into lockdown<sup>279</sup>. UNICEF estimates that approximately 150 million additional children are currently living in multidimensional poverty – without access to essential services; as for example, 31% of schoolchildren worldwide cannot be reached by digital and broadcast remote learning programs.<sup>280</sup> Although children seems to be less likely to manifest serious illness due to COVID-19, the health of world children is expected to be influenced through a series of secondary effects of the pandemic. For example, almost 200,000 additional stillbirths could occur over the next 12 months, as women are less likely or able to access health services due to COVID-19.<sup>281</sup> COVID-19 is also expected to decrease access to health-saving vaccines and approximately 80 million children under the age of 1 may miss out on receiving life-saving vaccines.<sup>282</sup> Restriction measures taken by States to control the diaspora of the virus, such as long-term confinement in the household, have been found to increase the risks for domestic violence, exploitation and abuse of children, while, at the same time, 66% of countries reported a disruption in violence against children-related services due to COVID-19.<sup>283</sup> Children already living in precarious and at risk situations, such as children on the move, become even more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>284</sup>

### Greece response to COVID-19

Greece, which has been burdened with overcoming the effects of a 10-year-long recession and the aftermath of strict austerity measures, counting 30% of its population at risk for poverty and social exclusion (2019), is expected to be particularly challenged by the pandemic. For example, it is expected that the GDP in Greece will contract by 7,5% to 9,8% in 2020<sup>285</sup>; such reduced economic activity bears the risk of causing more families and children to lose their source of household income and fall into poverty.

Since March 2020, the Greek government has taken a series of measures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the society, principally in what concerns the fields of economy, health, education and protection of vulnerable populations. Examples of concrete measures taken to support the Greek economy and business include the suspension of VAT payments for business closed after State's decision in an attempt to decrease the diaspora of the virus, and extension for payment of insurance contributions for affected business was granted. To support financially the affected households, a minimum guaranteed income for employees of businesses closed due to State's directions was established. Also, the deadlines for application to receive childbirth allowance were suspended. Additionally, the entitlement to the two main programs for the fight against poverty and the prevention of homelessness, namely the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) and the Housing Benefit, was extended unconditionally for either two or three months depending on the due month of each application.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, an additional income support was granted to all households with at least one minor member receiving the GMI. More specifically, the approximately 56,000 GMI households received in the end of May 2020 an additional amount of 100 euros for the first minor and 50 euros for each additional minor of the household, with a maximum of 300 euros per household. Lastly, an additional income support (double payment) was granted to all households of GMI in the end of December 2020.

Concerning education, the state established an online-platform through which students from age 4 to 17 could participate in distance-learning, and over 90,000 laptops and tablets were provided by private donors, ESPA and other funding programmes to support distance-learning.<sup>287</sup> Laptops and tablets were borrowed to students following specific socio-economic criteria. Moreover, during the 2020-2021 school year, psychologists and social workers were hired for general education schools, with the goal of tackling the blowback of the pandemic.<sup>288</sup> In tertiary education, distance learning was also organized and implemented by State Universities. The National Public Health Organization (EODY), in collaboration with Municipalities, performs free-of-cost rapid tests to the general population, and recently the Ministry of Health launched an informative platform on the development of the pandemic in Greece, which was made available to the general public and is updated daily<sup>289</sup>. To mitigate the limited access to services due to COVID-19, the State granted an extension of residency permits for special reasons to third-country nationals residing in Greece.<sup>290</sup> Currently, the Greek government is being focused on vaccination planning against COVID-19.

*“In reality, education never stops. And now with COVID-19 education has not stopped, it continues through the internet, but this does not apply to all children. If children do not have internet or devices the state should cover this.”*

– Children and Youth consultation, Greece 2021



### Areas of special concern during and after the pandemic

Special attention is required so that “no child is left behind” amidst the multiple adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Across EU countries, children in poor households, those living in deprived areas and ethnic minorities have disproportionately been affected by Covid-19<sup>291</sup>; thus, targeted actions to support them and their families are needed. For example, as has been reported globally, home schooling during the crisis has exacerbated and highlighted existing educational inequalities.<sup>292</sup> Whilst widespread digitalisation mitigates education loss caused by school closures,<sup>293</sup> children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have home access to the internet and a computer, a quiet place in which to study and fewer resources, including dedicated parental support, to support them, resulting in lower school performance.<sup>294</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to increase mental health problems in the general population. The Coronavirus Health Impact Survey (Crisis) states that ‘individual and societal constraints are particularly threatening to people with increased vulnerability due to mental disorders.’<sup>295</sup> The Survey points out ‘the urgent need of identifying resources at both public and individual levels that can be directed to prevent even further challenges to health and well-being beyond that of the virus itself.’ The Crisis survey endeavours to enable researchers and care providers to examine the extent and impact of COVID-19 on mental health, and on the behaviour of individuals and families across diverse international settings. As mental health services for children are very limited nationwide, it will be critical to consider this data in the context of Greece and ensure the design and implementation of policies to better protect the mental health of children and their families during and after Covid-19 pandemic.

While one in three women experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime, the effect of the pandemic on an increase in gender-based violence is notable, particularly among vulnerable populations (namely refugees and migrants) where a high level of violence against women and girls is already more prevalent.<sup>296</sup> Intimate Partner violence (IPV) has increased at a dramatic rate since the pandemic started, with UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, referring to it as a “horrifying surge in domestic violence” and advocated for all governments to ‘put women’s safety first in their responses to the pandemic.’<sup>297</sup> In addition, as health care services globally turn their full attention to responding to Covid-19, data suggest that essential services including domestic violence shelters and helplines have faced constraints in maintaining their work and increasing capacity to respond to the increase in the need for support.<sup>298</sup> Pre-existing referral pathways and known support mechanisms may have closed or changed their mode of working in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The situation analysis shows that Greece has always been a firm supporter of children's rights and committed to ensuring that all children have access to equal opportunities in the country. Yet, nearly a decade of austerity measures and government spending cuts, combined with continuous migratory flows, has taken its toll on Greek public services, structures and systems, with a particular impact on the most vulnerable children in Greek society.

The report outlines specific areas where the situation for children and youth needs to be improved (maternal and child health, education, protection, employment, participation). Further analysis is needed on factors impeding more effective empowerment of girls and young women, in light of Greece's score on the Gender Equality Index, the lowest in the EU.

### **Recommendation 1: Enhance health and nutrition services from conception through early childhood and youth/adolescence**

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Although, generally, the Greek health care system can adequately respond to the needs of its citizens, it would benefit from improvements to primary health care, particularly at local level, accompanied by appropriate evidence-based planning (e.g. a comprehensive national plan) with a focus on prevention and early intervention. Such efforts should have a strong intercultural component including: culturally-sensitive training for PHC staff; necessary mediation/interpretation resources; collaboration with local actors and initiatives; and health campaigns targeting specific vulnerable groups to better address and promote their health needs and preventative care (including vaccination). Equitable access to health care services would also be improved through prioritized management and funding for rural areas and islands.

Considering the urgent needs around mental health, especially for children and adolescents, improvements are needed around the sectoral framework and coordination between mental health services at national/subnational level and central government as well as an overall increase in the number of specialist staff to ensure sufficient national coverage.

The overall health and wellbeing of children is dependent on interventions beginning in early childhood and continuing through their educational years into adolescence. By significantly increasing compulsory physical education classes in schools and availability of free participation in activities at municipal level the prevalence of obesity can be reduced for all ages. Similarly, raising awareness on nutrition and healthy living can foster improved habits and support the development of children. While National Dietary Guidelines exist and are disseminated to schools, implementation of such guidelines and their monitoring would promote the availability of healthy meals in schools, which is particularly important for children from low income households.

### **Recommendation 2: Improve equitable access to quality and inclusive education for all children**

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A clearly articulated, long-term educational strategy with identified funding gaps linked to an increase in the proportion of the national budget allocation for education will help ensure sufficient resources both material and human to provide quality education for all children from every age group. Similarly,

a monitoring system, including performance indicators, which can provide quality disaggregated data will support efficient planning and allocation of resources while identifying systemic bottlenecks at national and sub-national levels.

There is a need to accelerate the expansion of early childhood education that will also contribute to the roll-out of the existing ECE policy and achievement of the European target of 95 % participation, emphasizing early inclusion and retention of marginalized children in formal education.

A review of the school curricula, administrative regulations and existing ‘compensatory education’ schemes should apply an inclusivity lens to ensure that children with disabilities, Roma and refugee and migrant children access and adapt to mainstream education facilities. Digital tools and technologies should also be applied to improve learning outcomes and overcome equity barriers. In addition, social perceptions and attitudes that prevent equitable, inclusive and multicultural approaches should be addressed.

The Greek education system should move away from knowledge-based learning towards critical thinking and practical/adaptive skills which also match labour market needs. Child-centred classroom practices and teaching styles, such as blended forms of learning, should be encouraged along with regular feedback from children, parents and communities.

### **Recommendation 3: Expand and strengthen the child protection system to better respond to children’s needs**

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Moving towards an integrated child protection system with relevant coordination mechanisms will ensure children have access to effective prevention and response services. Awareness raising strategies and campaigns should also be implemented to generate a national discussion on violence against children while combatting racism, bias, and stereotypes that can lead to harm against vulnerable groups. Comprehensive up-to-date evidence on violence, neglect, abuse and/or discrimination affecting children will steer public debate and facilitate consensus on the most urgent child protection priorities.

A comprehensive legal and normative framework for family- and community-based forms of care is critical to the successful implementation of the National Action Plan on Deinstitutionalization. Specific legislation such as foster care and guardianship will need to be fully operationalized to achieve this goal.

Increasing human resources and strengthening capacity of the social service workforce (including through re-skilling and re-deployment of personnel from large-scale residential facilities) will be essential to deliver quality support to children and their caregivers in communities. Standardized ‘case management’ tools should be developed, ensuring the appropriate follow up and response on each individual situation, across sectoral divides.

A child-friendly justice system is an integral component to the full protection of children in Greece and must include: equitable access for all children; age -and needs-appropriate judicial procedures; and accessible information on rights. Professionals should receive training, when needed, on how to interact with children in an age-appropriate manner, including when communicating about the results of a proceeding, and to respect the child’s view and best interests.

The views of all stakeholders, including children, should be sought to identify the different forms of support that a modernized child protection system will be expected to offer.

## **Recommendation 4: Strengthen inclusive and systematic participation of children and youth**

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Promoting the meaningful participation of children and youth, leading to a real influence on decisions, is essential to ensuring an inclusive and participatory process. This can be done through establishing, improving and providing adequate resources for mechanisms of child participation at national and sub-national level. Education around citizenship, equality and participation in democratic processes should be strengthened and students need to be supported to engage in their school's daily life and decision making. More needs to be done to ensure that children have relevant information on their rights, how to access participatory mechanisms, and the outcome of their participation.

The National Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth (2017-2027) should be updated to bring in the perspective of young people on existing barriers to social inclusion and active citizenship. Similarly, a corresponding Action Plan and monitoring framework would help influence the formulation of youth-specific commitments in sectoral policies, accompanied by funds allocation.

## **Recommendation 5: Reduce youth unemployment through improved job readiness and skills development**

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Job readiness for youth entering the labour market should be improved through integrated, modularized programmes that include: basic and life skills development, active job orientation and counseling 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.

These programmes would benefit from a strong monitoring and evaluation framework to help identify bottlenecks and make necessary adjustments for improved efficiency. Coordination and inter-ministerial efforts could be improved in order to mainstream NEET prioritization and decrease the % youth in NEET in Greece.

## **Recommendation 6: Reduce children's risk of poverty and social exclusion**

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There is a critical need for a National Action Plan Against Poverty based on evidence, with explicit targets and resources linked to combatting child poverty. A participatory process will ensure that opinions of families, young people and children themselves are heard and reflected in the newly designed elements of social protection policies.

Greece could benefit from EU initiatives and funding – such as the Child Guarantee and the European Social Fund – to establish multi-annual financed plans to strengthen the socio-economic inclusion of children in order to address generational poverty and disadvantage. Additionally, the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility provide opportunities for Greece to mitigate the economic windfall of the COVID-19 pandemic, including through specific policies for children and youth.

## **Recommendation 7: Develop a National Action Plan for Children's Rights, ensure disaggregated data for children, and monitor progress of national priorities for children**

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A comprehensive national programme of action for children is critical in order to realize the stated goals set by the Greek government. A national plan must include clear targets and milestones linked to the Global Goals / Agenda 2030, the EU Child Rights Strategy, and Greece's own development objectives. Such a plan must be costed, financing sourced, and progress tracked through consistent and transparent monitoring. Only then can the rights of every child in Greece be enjoyed, yielding lasting social and economic dividends for the country.

In addition, a centralized inter-ministerial mechanism should be established with the primary aim of monitoring children's rights, aligned with the national action plan for children, and tracking progress made against priority areas in line with the Convention on the Rights of Child and the Agenda 2030.

The collection, accessibility and usage of information on children should be strengthened in order to ensure availability of disaggregated data, including an equity lens, to analyze barriers and inform national planning and priorities.

Finally, when deciding how to allocate funds effectively, governments must respond to children's full range of needs. Public resources must be adequately directed to health, education, nutrition, protection and other areas to give children everything they need to fulfil their potential. Innovative financing approaches such as blended finance, public-private partnerships, and ESG funding will help open new doors to additional resources for children.

## Annex 1. Greece – Legislative landscape

### Political economy and governance

- In accordance with article 28, paragraph 1, of the Constitution, the rules of international law, as well as international conventions, become an integral part of the domestic Greek law and prevail over any other opposite provision of law.
- Greece became an EU member state in January 1981 and is represented by 21 members in the European Parliament: it joined the Schengen area in January 2000.
- Greece has been a member of NATO since 1952.

### Convention on the rights of the child, monitoring of child rights and national human rights institutions

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
L. 2101/1992	CRC ratification
L. 4491/2017	National Mechanism for the development, monitoring and evaluation of Action Plans for the Rights of the Child was established under the General Secretary of Human Rights, Ministry of Justice.
L. 3094/2003	The Deputy Ombudsman for Children monitors and intervenes for the implementation of child rights in the country
L. 2667/1998	Law established the National Committee for Human Rights. Its role is to monitor relevant issues, inform the public and promote relevant research, exchange experience with other States and International Orgs., and develop policy-making proposals on relevant issues.  The same Law establishes the National Committee for Bioethics, which monitors applications relevant to bioethics and study their bioethical, social, and legislative effects. It also informs the public on relevant issues.
L. 4356/2015	Law establishes the National Council against Racism and Intolerance

### Recent legislative developments

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
L. 4760/2020	Protective custody for UASC has been abolished
L. 4756/2020	Programme Home and work for the homeless
L. 4659/2020	Birth allowance and birth registration procedures
L. 4604/2019	Gender equality issues, prevention and fight against gender violence

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4538/2018</b>	Legislative framework for the provision of alternative care to children without parental care (law on adoption and foster care)
<b>and</b>	
<b>MD 13734/538 of 08/04/2019</b>	
<b>L. 4554/2018</b>	Guardianship system for unaccompanied minors
<b>L. 4531/2018</b>	Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)
<b>L. 4491/2017</b>	Legal recognition of gender identity
<b>L. 4472/2017</b>	Housing benefit (as modified with law 4659/2020)
<b>L. 4478/2017</b>	Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) which aims to support and strengthen the fight against terrorism while reaffirming that all measures taken to prevent or suppress terrorist offences have to respect the rule of law and democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms.
<b>L. 4389/2016</b>	Guaranteed Minimum Income (as modified with law 4659/2020)
<b>L. 4368/2016</b>	Healthcare coverage for unsecured and vulnerable social groups
<b>L. 4415/2016</b>	R&M children's integration into the public educational system
<b>MDs 131024/Δ1 of 29/08/2016 and 152360/ΓΔ4 of 23/09/2016, Circular 167078 / ΓΔ4</b>	

## Right to health

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4368/2016</b>	Establishment of Community Centers, managed at Municipal level, with service priority provided to families at risk of poverty and social exclusion, the unemployed, Roma, migrants, and other vulnerable groups.  The same law reinforces that all recipients of health services have equal rights (article 33) and maintain their human and civil rights while receiving health services (article 59).
<b>L. 4486/2017</b>	Primary Health Care Reform in line with WHO principles. It is intended to improve access to health services as well as rationalization of existing services and resources.

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4675/2020</b>	National Law on Prevention and Protection and Promotion of Public Health, established the 'Spyros Doksiadis' National Prevention Programme. It details the development of public health services for all citizens, including children, and defines departmental responsibility within the Ministry of Health for implementation. Article 3 foresees the development of a National Action Plan for Public Health. It also foresees the development of Special Action Plans for Public Health referring to regional specificities, specific vulnerable groups, and specific diseases (e.g., HIV)

## Maternal and child health

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4316/2014 (Art. 3)</b>	Includes measures for the promotion of breastfeeding
<b>Circular Γ36/Δ.Φ.8.5/ Γ.Π.οικ.11771 (15-02-2017)</b>	New Child Health Booklet. Management of issues related to distribution of the Booklet to relevant Agencies and Families

## Nutrition

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 2817/2000</b>	Ministry of Health provides educational material to teach children about nutrition and eating habits, with the subject taught by trained teachers from university departments

## Mental health

Law/ MD/	Short description
<b>M.D. Γ3α/ Γ.Π.οικ.44342/2019</b>	Organization and operation of Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Centers

## Online exploitation and bullying

<b>M.D. 79910/ΓΔ4/2020</b>	Establishment of a Committee in the Ministry of Education to prevent, deter and deal with bullying
<b>Circular 03-10-2014, Ministry of Education</b>	(Online exploitation and bullying) Implementation of actions for the Development and Operation of a Network for the Prevention and Response of Phenomena of School Violence and Bullying



## Right to education

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4521/2018</b>	(Access to education) kindergarten for 4-5 years old has been integrated in the compulsory education scheme, as part of the primary education. The full enactment of the legislation is not anticipated until the school year 2021-2022, with municipalities currently able to apply for funding to build additional facilities.
<b>L. 4415/2016</b>	Regulates Greek-language teaching, Intercultural education, and other relevant provisions
<b>L. 1566/1985</b>	Fundamental law that defines the structure and function of Primary and Secondary Education.
<b>L. 4547/2018</b>	(Quality education) Law made changes in reorganizing support structures in schools and includes such measures as greater autonomy in schools through self-evaluation by schools, a more streamlined approach to resource management and new roles of educational coordinators (replacing school advisors); such methods intend to increase school autonomy. Teacher evaluation and career development remain an area for development.
<b>L. 3879/2010</b>	(Quality education) Established the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) that provide resources to disadvantaged schools and students instead of focusing on individual vulnerable populations (Roma, immigrants, Muslim minorities). The policy endeavored to tackle social and regional inequities to reduce the share of early leavers from education, notably in rural areas. Although the implementation of this policy has not been fully developed, ZEP reception classes have been a very important part of implementation policies.
<b>L. 4692/2020</b>	(Quality education) Law foresees the pilot project "Laboratory of Skills" in Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary Education (life skills technology, science). The Institute of Educational Policy should write an evaluation report at the end of the pilot phase. (Pilot) English in Kindergartens; changes in the didactic hours of Courses in Primary and Secondary education; changes in the form of evaluating the students. Changes in Lyceum and in the process of being admitted to the University. The certification received by students after Secondary education should include evaluation of their behavior. Foundation of Experimental and Model Schools.
<b>L. 4713/2020</b>	(Quality education) Modernization of Private education and other Provisions recognizes the degrees from private Universities as equal to those of public universities, with same professional rights. Foresees measures on the evaluation of private schools, the organization of private schools, and employment of personnel.
<b>L. 4485/2017</b>	(Muslim students) Public schools with Muslim pupils are allowed, by law, to provide optional Islamic religious instruction (while Catholic pupils may receive religious instruction on the islands of Tinos and Syros) and at Eid al-Fitr and Eid a-Adha Muslim pupils are granted absence from school

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 2341/1995</b>	(Muslim students) Sets specific admission quota of 0.5% of university places for students from Muslim minority backgrounds
<b>Joint MD 4187/2017 (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)</b>	(Nurseries and ECD) Regulation of municipal nurseries operation

## Right to protection

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4659/2020</b>	(Birth registration, birth allowance and Social Security number) Regulates the digitalized birth registration procedures; birth registration takes place at public and private maternity hospitals and clinics immediately after birth. Concurrently, the infant receives its Social Security Insurance Number (AMKA) and enters automatically into the Social Security scheme of its parents, and the family can apply for the childbirth benefit of 2000 Euros
<b>MD 717/2020</b>	(Social Security number for asylum seekers) PAAYPA, grants asylum seekers free access to public health
<b>L. 4332/2015</b>	(Greek citizenship) Modified the Code of Greek Citizenship and established an increase in prerequisites for obtaining the Greek citizenship, including proof of stable work in the country and minimum income equal to the minimum salary of an unskilled worker, and increased time of legal residency in the country from 3 to 7 years.
<b>L. 4735/2020</b>	
<b>L. 4109/2013</b>	(Children without parental care) Public child protection institutions located in each region of the country were merged with public institutions hosting adults with chronic diseases, disabilities, and elderly into Regional Social Welfare Centers, supervised by the General Directorate of Social Solidarity, MoLSA.
<b>L. 4538/2018</b>	(Children without parental care) Reform of the legislative framework for foster care and adoption.
<b>MD 13734/538 of 08/04/2019</b>	With Ministerial Decision, the development and implementation of an Information System for Special and National Registries of minors in need for fostering, foster carers and adoptions is foreseen.
<b>L. 4620/2019</b>	(Children in detention) Ratification of the Code of Penal Procedure
<b>L. 4760/2020</b>	(Children in detention) Protective custody of UASC abolished
<b>L. 3500/2006</b>	(Violence against children) Defined 'family' as the people with which the child cohabits and established corporal punishment and witnessing of domestic violence as forms of domestic violence

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 4531/2018</b>	(Violence against children) Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) which aims to support and strengthen the fight against terrorism while reaffirming that all measures taken to prevent or suppress terrorist offences have to respect the rule of law and democratic values, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Enforcement into marriage is recognized as a form of human trafficking
<b>L. 3727/2008</b>	(Violence against children) Lanzarote Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse came into force with Law
<b>L. 4267/2014</b>	(Violence against children) Harmonization of the Greek legislation with Directive 93/2011/EU on fighting against sexual abuse and exploitation of children and child pornography
<b>L. 3875/2010</b>	(Violence against children) Ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols – the Palermo Protocol
<b>L. 4216/2013</b>	(Violence against children) Ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
<b>L. 4198/2013</b>	(Violence against children) Harmonization of the National legislation with Directive 36/2011/EU for the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings and the protection of victims
<b>M.D. 30840/20.9.2016</b>	(Violence against children) Establishment of a national identification and referral system (NRM) for victims and presumed victims of human trafficking
<b>L. 4636/2019</b>	(Violence against children) Foresees the obligation of the competent authorities to inform NRM upon identification of a human trafficking victim
<b>L. 3692/2008</b>	(Violence against children) Agreement between Greece and Albania to fight against child trafficking
<b>L. 4251/2014</b>	(Violence against children) Migration Code defines the victim of human smuggling and foresees measures for the protection of children victims of human smuggling
<b>L. 4478/2017</b>	(Violence against children) Transposed the Directive 2012/29/EU that establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime
<b>L. 4285/2014</b>	(Violence against children) Defines and foresees measures against racist violence, including towards minors
<b>L. 4356/2015</b>	(Violence against children) Establishment of the National Council against Racism and Intolerance
<b>Penal Code art. 312 and</b>	(Violence against children) Aspects of some of the criminal activities that make up "bullying" have been included (e.g. age difference between perpetrator and victim for an action to be considered as criminal offence, penalties, etc.).
<b>Law 4322/2015</b>	(Violence against children) Aspects of some of the criminal activities that make up "bullying" have been included (e.g. age difference between perpetrator and victim for an action to be considered as criminal offence, penalties, etc.).

Law/ MD/ Circular	Short description
<b>L. 3500/2006</b>	(Violence against children) Professionals and especially education professionals who come in contact with children are obliged (Law) to refer any case of child sexual abuse and exploitation to authorities.
<b>L. 3727/2008</b>	
<b>Code of Criminal Procedures art. 40 and</b>	Citizens are also obliged to refer cases of child abuse and neglect
<b>Penal Code art. 232 of</b>	
<b>Civil Code art. 1350</b>	(Child Marriage) Under Civil Code, marriage is forbidden for children under 18 years old. However, child marriage is still legally permitted under certain conditions, including pregnancy, cultural and religious customs, and impositions. However, law recognizes as minimum age of consent to sexual intercourse the 15 years
<b>L. 4511/2018 (amended L. 1920/1991)</b>	(Child Marriage) Eliminated the mandatory enforcement of Sharia Law, and states that matters of family law be regulated by civil courts in all but the most exceptional circumstances and on the condition that both sides provide notarized consent that these are their wishes
<b>L. 1182/1981</b>	(Child Labour) Ratified the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 concerning minimum age for admission to employment (specifically Recommendation 146)
<b>L. 2918/2001</b>	ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the elimination of the worst forms of child labor (notably Recommendation No. 190)
<b>L. 1387/1989</b>	(Child labor) Regulative framework for child labour. Laws state that no child below 15 should work, with the exception of some specific roles deemed appropriate where strict provisions for their health and security are met.
<b>L. 2918/2001</b>	Children can participate in occasional and short-term light work of familial character, such as agricultural and livestock work, with the prerequisite that those are taking place during the day.
<b>L. 3850/2010</b>	
<b>Presidential Decree 62/1998</b>	
<b>L. 2918/2001</b>	(Child labor) Foresee the development of Action Plans for the protection of working children and targeted action developed by the Labor Inspectorate, with approval by the MoLSA
<b>L. 3850/2010</b>	

## Children and justice

Law	Short description
<b>L. 4478/2017</b>	Ratification of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime
<b>L. 3189/2003</b>	Law on the reform of juvenile criminal law and other provisions
<b>L. 3680/2010</b>	Law on improvements in criminal law for juvenile offenders, prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency and crime

Law	Short description
<b>L. 4322/2015 and L. 4356/2015</b>	Modified specific provisions of the previous Penal Code
<b>L. 4619/2019</b>	ratified the new Penal Code
<b>L. 4640/2019</b>	Establishment of the “House of Child and other provisions” which modified provision of Law 4478/2017. It also foresees systematic collection of statistical data on the implementation of child’s rights during judicial procedures, every 3 years, starting from June 2021;
<b>L. 4689/2020</b>	Transposition of Directive 2016/800/EU on procedural guarantees for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings.

## Youth

Law	Short description
<b>L. 3443/2006</b>	Introduced local youth councils aimed at strengthening the participation of young people aged above 15 years old in local issues management

## Children on the move

Law/ PD	Short description
<b>L. 4636/2019</b>	Consolidates the framework for international protection applications
<b>L. 3907/2011</b>	reformed Asylum Service, an Appeals Committee and a First Reception Service
<b>Presidential Decree No. 141/2013, art. 23, paras. 1 &amp; 2(a)</b>	The family unit of those who are recognized as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is protected by law and the families of such persons acquire the same status as the applicant
<b>Presidential Decree No. 141/2013, art. 28.</b>	Recognized minor refugees and asylum seekers must have access to education. Youth and adults should also have access to educational training and development under the same terms and conditions as nationals

## Children with disabilities

Law	Short description
<b>L. 4074/2012</b>	Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol
<b>L. 4547/2018</b>	Support structures of primary and secondary education for all students

## Addressing violence against women

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Law/ PD	Short description
<b>L. 3500/2006</b>	Constitutes the main instrument to combat domestic violence
<b>L. 4604/2019</b>	Promotion of fundamentally gender equality, preventing and combating gender-based violence
<b>L. 4531/2018</b>	Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)
<b>Presidential Degree 37/2019</b>	Establishment of the Department of Domestic Violence of the Hellenic Police

## Endnotes

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<sup>277</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Gender\\_Action\\_Plan\\_brochure-web.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Gender_Action_Plan_brochure-web.pdf)

<sup>278</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>

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<sup>281</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), 'A Neglected Tragedy: The global burden of stillbirths', United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2020.

<sup>282</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/resources/immunization-coverage-are-we-losing-ground/>

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<sup>284</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/covid-19/>

<sup>285</sup> IOBE, The Greek Economy – Quarterly report 03/20 <https://oe-e.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WebPage.pdf> (page. 46)

<sup>286</sup> All applications due in March, April and May were extended by two months and all applications due in November, December 2020 and January 2021 were extended by three months.

<sup>287</sup> Education and Training Monitor, Greece, European Commission 2020

<sup>288</sup> More specifically, the hiring was done in the context of the initiative "Support of School Units of Primary and Secondary Education with Psychologists and Social Workers", to tackle the consequences of COVID-19.

<sup>289</sup> [https://covid19.gov.gr/covid19-live-analytics/?s=04&fbclid=IwAR04QVJ50uKFHBCq2Jur8WFI2\\_SNZ\\_1lx15K1KwsxQhiRp\\_8sEqmcqIYkzo](https://covid19.gov.gr/covid19-live-analytics/?s=04&fbclid=IwAR04QVJ50uKFHBCq2Jur8WFI2_SNZ_1lx15K1KwsxQhiRp_8sEqmcqIYkzo)

<sup>290</sup> Legislative act: Urgent response measures for combat the effects of COVID and the need to restrict its diaspora, 11th March 2020

<sup>291</sup> Health at a Glance: Europe 2020, European Commission

<sup>292</sup> Covid-19 and home schooling: London School of Economics, 27 April 2020

<sup>293</sup> Combatting COVID-19's effect on children, OECD 11 August 2020

<sup>294</sup> Educational inequalities in Europe and physical school closures during Covid-19, Science for Policy Briefs, European Commission, 04/2020

<sup>295</sup> The Coronavirus Health Impact Survey (Crisis), National Institute of Mental Health

<sup>296</sup> Exacerbating the other epidemic: how Covid-19 is increasing violence against displaced women and girls. Cone, D. Refugees International, 4/08/20

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