

“ Country recommendation

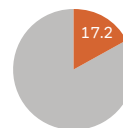
Greece should pursue a fiscal policy aimed at mitigating inequalities with a focus on nutrition of children in particular vis-à-vis the global COVID-19 crisis and increase of costs for living.

Greece should aim at reducing inequalities through direct taxation such as personal income tax and not through indirect taxation (VAT). The exclusion of Value Added Tax from all essential goods in child nutrition is further recommended.

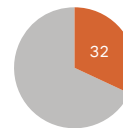
Country Profile 2022



Greece



Child Population:
1.83 million
(17.2% of total population)



Child Poverty Rate:
32% (2021) ▲*

* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[The Smile of the Child](#)

European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

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

Greece's European Semester Country Report covers partially child poverty and social exclusion, early childhood development, education, children with a migrant background, children's mental health and wellbeing, and children's right to be heard. Greece ranks last in the EU on participation in early childhood education and care (age 3+) with major challenges linked to affordability and quality. To increase participation in early childhood education and care, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will subsidise the creation of new childcare facilities in municipalities and in large companies.

The most **disappointing finding** is that **child poverty is not**

mentioned in the **country report**. Even though it reached the historical minimum of 30.8% in Greece in 2020, it has kept increasing to 32% in 2021, making it one of the highest in the EU.

The most promising comment in the country report is: 'Greece recorded the largest drop in the share of early leavers from education and training in the last decade from 13.5% in 2010 to 3.2% in 2021, and now has one of the lowest rates in the EU'.¹

The Country Specific Recommendations for Greece respond well to the general needs in Greece but unfortunately fail to include reforms regarding the specific **needs of children in Greece**. The CSRs however recommend to 'sustain the purchasing power of the most vulnerable households so as to cushion the impact of the energy price hike and help limit inflationary pressures from

second round effects via targeted and temporary measures'. Many children face problems regarding the **smooth and safe living conditions at home** in Greece (power cuts because of unpaid bills, unsafe heating methods, cold and damp houses, etc.), therefore The Smile of the Child welcomes this recommendation. It aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which encourages taking appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child in case of need, and provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing, and housing.

Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

Child poverty in Greece

Greece has a total child population of 1.83 million, 32% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Research has consistently raised the issue of child poverty and made it more visible within the public sphere. While Greece has already pursued some social policy measures to address child poverty, the recent financial crisis (2009 – 2018) and the new crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have made another negative impact on the Greek economy. **Unemployment has affected a significant number of citizens** and their families; therefore, there is a necessity to provide adequate nutrition to all children.

In light of the current situation, Greece should receive more

¹ European Commission, Greece European Semester Country Report, p. 47.

financial aid from the EU to prevent children from starving. Moreover, national decision-makers in charge of fiscal policy should reduce inequalities through direct taxation like personal income tax, and not through indirect taxation such as the Value Added Tax (VAT). In the scope of public finances, direct taxes are usually perceived as an effective tool for the mitigation of income inequalities, while indirect taxes have proven a burden for lower-income classes. An illustrative example of how regressing direct taxation can improve income equality is the VAT exemption on all essential goods in child nutrition, which raises the disposable income of low-income families. The efforts aimed at mitigating child poverty should be coordinated, and many different institutions dealing with policy should be mobilised, primarily the institutions **implementing fiscal policy**. The Smile of the Child explains that

welfare provisions are currently ineffective and problematic; therefore, a new Ministry that would solely focus **on child well-being, child poverty, social welfare, public finances, and welfare** economics should be set up. The Smile of the Child can provide many inspirational practices for its operation.

Groups of Children and Services:

Regarding nutrition, emphasis must be put on children in high school. **The Smile of the Child recommends the expansion of the provision of school meals from the elementary level to junior high and high schools.** In order to implement this policy, significant funds must be ensured to cover the financial cost of the nutrition of all children in Greece without any exclusions.²

Another priority group should be single-parent families with mother or father. Overall,

decision-makers should focus mostly on reform of public finances to mitigate child poverty in Greece.

A good practice in mitigating child poverty is the [National Observatory for Child Well-being in Greece research project](#), which monitored child poverty multi-dimensionally in the central, metropolitan region of Attica. The project aimed at proposing policies to improve the quality of life of children and their families, by including **5,403 children belonging to three distinct school categories:** the 6th grade of elementary school (10–11 years old), the 3rd grade of junior high (13–14 years old), and the 3rd grade of high school (16–17 years old). **The introduction of this initial indicator of child welfare helped, among other things, to analyse the situation.** The inordinate growth of child poverty, caused by the economic crisis in Greece, created urgent demands

for social scientific research. The proposed research methodology attempts to interpret, measure, and monitor child wellbeing.

European Child Guarantee

Greece National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at the national level.

The Smile of the Child welcomes the [National Action Plan of the European Child Guarantee](#). The introduction of a system of guaranteed minimum income is a long awaited policy that will help cover needs of vulnerable families. However, there are several gaps. For example, given that child poverty is a multidimensional situation, it is disappointing to see

² [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Art. 18 and 24; [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), Art. 24.; [Greece Constitution](#), Art. 21, par. 1.

that the plan does not refer to any **multidimensional index of child poverty/well-being**.

On the other hand, the National Action Plan includes **very important measures for children in need in priority areas** such as (a) early childhood education and care, (b) education, school and extracurricular activities, (c) health care, (d) healthy diet, and (e) adequate housing.

It is noteworthy that, for the first time, special emphasis is given to **early intervention for infants**, including a prevention programme for children and parents. There are plans such as the *Hive* and *The Nannies of the neighbourhood*, as well as the creation of new places in early childhood care. In regards to the babysitting programme *The Nannies of the neighbourhood*, it is important to highlight that a multidisciplinary framework, training for professionals and

supervision are needed for the successful implementation of this measure.

For schooled children³, **creative employment centres** have been established. This provision partially covers the needs of families at risk, such as single-parent families or families with serious health problems, and therefore The Smile of the Child proposes the **extension of its own day care homes**, operating since 2004, as an action to prevent and strengthen families.

In regards to housing, targeted prevention actions are foreseen in the NAP through counselling and employment reintegration, among other things. **However, it does not explicitly mention the staffing of the related services to enable professionals to cope with the workload.**

The same is true for **strengthening families in**

order to avoid the separation of children from their families. The recruitment of professionals supporting biological families is not clearly reflected in the NAP.

Moreover, the NAP includes a measure **providing housing for women victims of violence and their minor children**.

In the field of **healthcare provision**, important measures concerning preventive controls, vaccinations, mobile medical units, creation of mental health centres, etc., will be implemented but there is an utmost need to resolve the situation of **uninsured children in all regions** of Greece.

In addition, given that one of the basic principles of the NAP is to combat discrimination, The Smile of the Child proposes issuing legitimising documents and the **acquisition of Greek citizenship for children with foreign parents born in Greece**, provided they

have studied for more than 6-8 years in Greek schools.

Finally, in relation to children with disabilities, there is **no equal access to healthcare services and in particular to specialised doctors for children with disabilities or developmental disorders**, for example children with autism. This issue is present especially in rural areas, but also in cities including Athens.⁴

The Smile of the Child was invited by the National Coordinator for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee to **participate in the preparation of the National Action Plan**. Other organisations such as the Child Health Institute, Municipal Social Welfare Departments, SOS Children's Villages, and Roots Research Centre, participated as well through a questionnaire. The Smile of the Child also organised an online direct exchange with the National Coordinator where

3 Law 4941 / 2022, Art. 104.

4 Hellenic Medical Students' International Committee - HeIMSIC, [Access to Health Care | People with Disabilities](#), 2021.

additional recommendations and proposed actions were discussed and subsequently submitted. Upon the release of the NAP, The Smile of the Child was informed and received thanks for their contribution.

‘Clearly, our participation is an example of good practice; however we believe that a more substantial dialogue and communication with the National Coordinator in terms of planning and targeting would have been more effective’.

EU Funding

Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

Investment in children has been and remains a priority for national funding through various schemes and initiatives. The [Partnership Agreement 2021-2027](#) (total budget 26.2 billion for 7 years) with 7 Sectoral Programmes (ex. Human Resources and Social Cohesion), 13 Regional Programmes, and Territorial Cooperation Programmes was adopted in July 2022 and many intended actions affect children directly or indirectly. Indicatively, **30% of the total funds will be dedicated to the priority of a more social Greece**. Similarly, 8% of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funds will be allocated to tackling child poverty.⁵

Civil society has been involved in the programming of EU Funds. The Managing Authority of

European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in Greece invites civil society organisations to open consultations through meetings and questionnaires for their participation in the elaboration of the new Programmatic Period Guide. Additionally, the Secretary General for Social Solidarity and Fight Against Poverty of the Hellenic Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs invited civil society organisations to a public consultation for the elaboration of the Programme *Roma Inclusion and Empowerment* and the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2021-2030. The Smile of the Child participated in all three consultations.

Projects funded by the EU in Greece

The Smile of the Child has been implementing EU funded projects in Greece for more than ten years. Currently, the organisation is

working on 16 active projects in either a coordinator or partner capacity.

Among these projects, the following are worth mentioning in this report:

- ***Integrated Territorial Synergies for Children Health and Protection II*** (2017 – 2023), European Territorial Cooperation Programme ‘Interreg V-A Greece –Bulgaria’ 2014-2020: This project aims at protecting and improving the quality of life of children in the cross-border area. More than 6,500 children in Greece and Bulgaria received medical examinations through this project that includes the offer of training seminars for professionals, among other things. In order to contribute to the treatment of the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was extended to implement a series of actions including voluntary

⁵ Kennedy A., *Child Guarantee National Action Plans – Targets, EU funding and governance*, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2022.

blood donations, provision of psychological and social support to children and families affected by the Covid-19 crisis, purchase of medical equipment with the purpose of strengthening National Health Systems at the cross-border level, training for school psychologists and educators, informative campaign, etc.

- **Homes for children in danger IV** (2022 – 2023): Funded under the Sectoral Development Program of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (National Development Program - NDP), this project aims at providing an **adequate framework for the protection and care of unaccompanied minors** and their preparation to reach autonomy. The project also finances the running costs of two existing homes for children at risk in Northern Greece with a special focus on unaccompanied refugee children and victims of abuse and neglect, irrespective of their nationality.

Priorities for EU funding in Greece

The Smile of the Child recommends investment to prioritise:

- child poverty and social inclusion, with a special focus on children with disabilities and children in precarious family situations;
- support to education and extracurricular activities;
- healthcare for children.

