

# Country Report Greece

## Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child  
Guarantee National Action Plan  
in Greece



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

## Taskforce Lead

The Smile of the Child

## Taskforce Team Members

Roots Research Center NGO, Greece;

Iliachtida-Hospitality Centre for Sick Children and Family, Greece.



There are 1,854,378 children in Greece. Children make up 17.3% of the total population. 31.5% of children in Greece are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

# Governance

## National actors and their functions

National Coordinator Mrs. Artemis Anagnostou-Dedouli, Honorary Director-General of Social Security and Welfare, at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Chairman of the Board at the National Center for Social Solidarity.

The National Center for Social Solidarity is under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which is the Ministry responsible for the thematic areas of (a) child protection (b) poverty alleviation (c) social security and (d) employment. The Ministry oversees, among other things, basic welfare programmes for child protection, such as foster care and adoption, children's access to day-care centres, as well as child protection benefits such as child benefit, birth allowance, and allowance for disadvantaged areas. In the context of anti-poverty programs, it is responsible for the minimum guaranteed income, social structures fighting poverty such as services and accommodation for the homeless, free meals, social groceries, social pharmacies, housing benefits and the social integration of minorities, etc. It also cooperates with

other Ministries such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry works closely with Eurochild members as it is also in charge of the Certification of our Organisations who are providers of primary, secondary and tertiary social care services.

## Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

UNICEF (November, 2020), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Greece, launched the two-year program "Child Guarantee" in Greece that consists of six actions/pillars focusing on deinstitutionalisation, reinforcement of foster care, support for autonomous living for care leavers, work readiness for vulnerable youth, inclusive education and research on child poverty and social inclusion.

Most child rights organisations active in the field attended the meeting and have regularly been informed about the outcomes of this 2-year programme. Many of the above are regulated by the provisions of the new Law 4837/2021 on social protection.

At present, the National Coordinator for the European Guarantee for Children has requested from civil society organisations active in the field of child protection (such as The Smile of the Child, SOS Children's Villages, Metadrasi, the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities etc.),

State bodies such as the Regional Social Welfare Centres, the Institute of Child Health but also the Child Counsel, to nominate representatives to participate in the procedures for the preparation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

### Main Recommendations by Taskforce Greece

- To expand the programme of support for the family services in the communities aiming at the detection and prevention of violence, abuse, substance abuse and child neglect. The support of families of low socio-economic background should include:
  - legal/expert advice regarding the legal documents and access to allowances.
  - educational programmes including learning languages & strengthening parenting skills.
  - provision of mental-health services.
  - jobs advice as well as more programmes are needed to help unemployed parents enter the labour market (for example employers in large companies could be required to ensure at least 10% of their employees are parents who have been unemployed).
  - provide temporary housing to families experiencing poverty (for example by renovating unused publicly-owned property);
- To expand the provision of all types of social services aimed at supporting children whose families are struggling, including Day Care Homes offered by The Smile of the Child. These services must be aimed at preventing separation of children from their parents whilst ensuring children receive the necessary care, education and stimulation needed for their holistic development;
- To check and enforce compliance with the basic standards of child care in residential settings, it is necessary to establish a robust mechanism that would provide: a) regular monitoring and reporting of data on operation of residential settings according to agreed indicators. Reported data/ indicators should be provided online in harmonised format to allow transparency and accountability. b) a compliance checking mechanism allowing for risk based inspections that would verify the data and conditions in situ;
- To develop a network of specialised mental-health structures (hospitals, medical centres, etc.) and services at community level to be accessible for all children to prevent hospitalisation and provide adequate care for children with psychiatric diagnosis. (Psychiatric clinics in hospitals also need increased capacity to cope with demand).
  - Public mental health services should be adequately staffed to respond to the part of psychiatric assessments as well as to a regular psychiatric monitoring and/or therapeutic support.
  - Hospitals should not be the only option available to children with psycho-communication problems (and not psychiatric) and mental health problems. There is a need to enable children and their families to access individualised and community-based services. Long stay of children in hospitals is particularly concerning. More effort should be invested in ensuring their speedy transition into foster families or other facilities providing the necessary quality of care;
- To improve the nutrition of children, in particular those living in families facing serious financial difficulties, schools should teach and implement (promote) a healthy lifestyle (exercise, healthy diet and sports). Through funded programmes, schools should provide at least one free meal during the school program. For example, contribution to the lunch for all children could help avoid the stigma of the poor students;
- To ensure children's right to education it is important to remove additional costs for families facing financial difficulties, for example tutoring, stationery costs, etc.. Schools should provide remedial teaching, foreign languages learning and computer learning.
  - The strengthening and increase of social tutorials is also a factor that will contribute to the children's free access to education. For example, the Social Tutoring Centres work with volunteer teachers and provide free additional teaching support to

students from needy or financially weak families in the respective Municipality.

- All children including the most vulnerable must be equipped and trained to be able to access online education.
- Social workers and psychologists need to be placed in all schools, in order to better address the needs of children and connect with other services and support for the children;
- Deinstitutionalisation should continue by prioritising and development of family-based care for children in alternative care. In Greece, there are still 1,600 children with and without disabilities who grow up in residential settings. The UNICEF

pilot project on deinstitutionalisation should be expanded to all regions;

- The cross-sector cooperation among local authorities, the juvenile prosecutors, the District Attorney, as well as social and health services needs to be improved. Children taken from the families should be primarily placed to foster care and their families received adequate support and therapy. Enforce the implementation of the regulation regarding placement of social workers in every District Attorney's Office;
- Municipalities should invest in ensuring all children have free access to sports activities (e.g. more suitably equipped sports centres), as well as expanding activities with schools.

## Children in Need and Outreach Measures

### Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

- Child victims of abuse who need protection from the state, hospitality in child protection areas or directly to adoptive/foster families. Children Victims of Sexual Abuse highlight the need for the implementation of Child-friendly Justice;
- Children with psychiatric problems who need hospitality and general support in specialised structures. Childhood and adolescent mental disorders are a complex problem due to the serious consequences that can lead to mental pain and dysfunction (disturbed relationships with peers and family, low school performance, etc.) that often accompany them, and/or financial burden of the family and society;

In Greece, anxiety disorders (the most common, affecting about 13% of young people aged 9-17 years), include panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and phobias. (5%). Eating Disorders (psychogenic anorexia and bulimia, 1%). Psychotic Disorders (schizophrenia, bipolar or manic-depressive disorder, up to 1% in older adolescents. Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder 0.6% (5-7%). Autism Spectrum Disorders (0.6%).



- Children with disabilities;
- Children experiencing substance abuse and/or neglect and abuse within their family. These children very often are left without family on the streets;
- Children (0-18 years) living in institutions – closed child protection structures. Enforcement of implementation of the approved legislation to ban placing of all children including young children 0-5 years old in particular, in institutions;
- Uninsured children, especially those in need of rehabilitation such as speech therapy, for example, minors who are placed in institutions due to the removal from their biological parents who fall into the welfare of the State;
- The unaccompanied minors;
- Adolescents at risk of offending;
- Roma children.

# Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

## Current national policies and strategies

- Existing policy frameworks such as Law 4538/2018 on adoptions and fostering aim to more accurately record children in child protection services and support deinstitutionalisation with a) control of adopters or foster parents, b) registration of children and renewal of Individual Family Rehabilitation Plans) and substantive procedures (drafting of the Individual Family Rehabilitation Plan, nationwide matching between parents and children, parent education, etc.), and c) return of children to their biological families. In addition, according to the new law 4837/2021 for the strengthening of child protection systems, the creation of Semi-Autonomous Living Hostels for young people over 15 years old is envisaged in order to integrate them more easily into society. For Persons with Disabilities, the Institution of Personal Assistants was introduced;
- Regarding child abuse within the child protection system, in each unit of the Child Protection Institutions a Juvenile Protection Officer is appointed and a National System for Recording and Monitoring Reports of incidents of child abuse has been established;

- Regarding the early childhood education and care, the programme “Kypseli” aims to: a) develop and enhance the capabilities and skills of infants and toddlers mainly through play and with respect to the uniqueness and individual growth rate of each infant and toddler, as well as the strengthening of the relationship between family and station; and (b) regularly monitor and evaluate the development and progress of infants and toddlers, in order to achieve early detection of abilities and needs and referral for further investigation of any learning difficulties, disabilities or other disorders. Creation of the “National Council for Preschool Education and Training” has been proposed as an advisory and consultative body;
- The framework has been established for the provision of home care services for infants and toddlers by a Curator and for the implementation of the Action “Neighbourhood Nannies”, with the aim of promoting equality between men and women in employment, through the harmonisation of professional and family life of working parents, and supporting women’s access to and position in the labour market;
- Municipalities and their legal entities, Social Welfare Centres, natural persons, as well as legal entities under private law, for-profit or non-profit, may provide hospitalisation and run rehabilitation centres for the provision of health services.

“

**To accomplish an ambitious, comprehensive and effective action plan of the European Child Guarantee the Child Guarantee National Coordinator should continuously collaborate with the civil society organisations as well as with the government agencies such as the social welfare centres and the Deputy Ombudsman for Children’s Rights.**

- Roots Research Center NGO, Greece

”



# Gaps and omissions in current national policies

In anticipation of the Ministerial Decision that will clarify the basic parameters of the professional fosterage and the amount of financial support for the correct implementation, the professional and specialised foster care should be adopted as soon as possible including adequate funding in order to serve children with disabilities and adolescents at risk of offending. Public awareness campaigns are needed to recruit new foster carers and increase the public understanding of fostering and challenge the common perception that fostering is a step towards adoption.

In regards to implementation of procedures and protocol for the implementation of the institution of kinship foster care at an earlier stage of the request for hospitality and the removal of the child from the wider family environment, there is a need for: a) training for First Instance Prosecutors who do not specialise in juvenile matters and b) implementation of

a protocol for the process of removal of children from the biological family when it is deemed inappropriate or unable to care for the minor child.

As far as Child Friendly Justice is concerned, the procedure for the abused child in Greece is exhaustive; as it includes repeated testimonies of children-victims in different services and makes it particularly traumatic for minors, who are re-victimised. The opening of the Independent Offices of Minor Victims or “Children’s Homes” (Barnahus model), adopted by Law 4478/2017, should be implemented. Houses were rented in five cities; many psychologists were trained in the US National Child Advocacy Center (NCAC), but proceedings “were frozen”.

There is also a need to establish long-stay hostels and provide meals for needy families on a daily basis in all municipalities and cities of the country.

## Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

### Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

A range of relevant policies and organisations have been established in Greece:

- A Special Roma Secretariat has been set up at the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, with responsibilities for coordinating Roma social inclusion actions. The “Roma Advocacy and Human Rights Observatory” is also an essential bridge to human rights, connecting the relevant bodies with the community;
- The Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity Organisation was created for the functional sectors of family benefits, the uninsured elderly and the Rural Home Account, and reflects the priorities for combating social exclusion;
- A National Register of Social Care Institutions has been created.

“

**Each child is a unique newcomer to this world, guaranteeing the link from the past and the present to the future. And each child is therefore entitled to be given proper chances to deploy its full potential, for its own sake but also for the sake of our society’s continuum.**

- The Smile of the Child

”

- A law on the rights of people with disabilities has been adopted and the operation of the Disability Certification Centres have been simplified;
- Recent Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Health to open new treatment centres for children;
- Establishment of a National Mechanism for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of integration and cohesion policies.

### Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

- There must be adequate staffing of social services including within child psychiatric departments in hospitals;
- Support structures for children with psychiatric problems and structures with drug rehabilitation programs especially for children must be created;
- Better support for juvenile delinquency is needed. Staffing of the juvenile prosecutors' offices with social workers. Provision of foster care treatment for adolescents at risk of offending;
- Reinforcement of the social services in regional and local level and the reinforcement of the community centres and the creation of new structures and partnerships between government agencies and civil society actors is needed.



## Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

### Existing checks and balances

Poverty indicators are important. The relevance of EUROSTAT's SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) in pinpointing and monitoring challenges and their depth. Maybe even more important are other EUROSTAT SILC data, which go into more detail about housing, access to education and health services.

**31.5% of children in Greece** are in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty, and this gap is deepening. This

clearly demonstrates that child poverty is persistent in Greek society and that there is thus an absolute and urgent necessity that the objective of combating poverty be present in all societal policy-making, across the board.

Therefore, it's important to monitor not only how widespread poverty is, but also its depth. Extreme poverty is a problem in Greece. The European Child Guarantee framework offers an opportunity not to be missed to address the matter properly and with urgency.