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# SOCIAL RIGHTS MONITOR 2020



## COUNTRY MONITOR: GREECE

The Covid-19 crisis has pushed back the efforts made in Greece, which had been hard-hit by the financial crisis of 2008. The unemployment rate is above 16%; income inequality is the highest in the European Union at a quintile share ratio of 5.1; and there are persistent gender and regional disparities. Moreover, the pressure to maintain the welfare system continues to overburden low-income households and other vulnerable groups, following recent tax cuts and the phasing out of the solidarity levy. These vulnerable groups must confront an increase in housing costs, high rates of out-of-pocket expenditure for healthcare and the diminishing effectiveness of social transfers, which currently reduce the risk of poverty by 30%. There are also reports of high rates of undeclared work and low wages,

and SOLDIAR's National Strategy Group in Greece considers precariousness as a main reason driving an increase in frustration and a high emigration rate. Furthermore, the education and healthcare systems have both experienced budgetary cuts and present severe labour shortages. These were highlighted in the European Commission's country-specific recommendations, which the NSG finds concerning especially during the pandemic and the switch to e-learning. In terms of inclusion of migrants, there are some inconsistencies reported by the NSG between the positive measures of the National Development Plans and the government restrictions on NGO work to support migrants and asylum seekers. These inconsistencies further hinder their access to essential services.

	2018	2019	EU-28 2019
Gini index <sup>1</sup>	32.3	31.0	30.1
Unemployment <sup>2</sup>	19.3%	17.3%	6.3%
Gender Equality Index <sup>3</sup>	51.2 (2019)	52.2 (2020)	67.9 (2020)
In-work poverty <sup>4</sup>	10.9%	10.1%	9.2%
Housing Overcrowding <sup>5</sup>	29.2%	28.7%	15.6%
CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor <sup>6</sup>		NARROWED	N/A

**Selected indicators on the state of social rights**

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

In the context of stable annual economic growth of 2% since 2017,<sup>7</sup> Greece is still recovering from the 2012 economic crisis. Some improvements have been seen in the reduction of income inequality since 2014 and of long-term unemployment,<sup>8, 9</sup> which is slowly reaching the European Union average. Yet Greece still has the highest unemployment in the Union, at 16.6% in 2019.<sup>10</sup> The rate is higher for some groups: the unemployment rate for women was 20.2%<sup>11</sup> at the end of 2019; that for youth was 32.6%;<sup>12</sup> and that for migrants was 28.6%.<sup>13</sup>

Greece's income inequality, too, is higher than the EU average, with a 5.1 quintile share ratio of the income of the top 20% of earners to that of the bottom 20%.<sup>14</sup>

Despite a rising tax-to-GDP ratio since the crisis, which reached 38.9% in 2019, the higher tax revenue is not financing a wider social safety net. Both the European Commission and the National Strategy Group (NSG), led by the Association for the Social Support of Youth (AR-SIS), agree that the system is overburdening

1 Eurostat (2020). Gini coefficient of equalised disposable income [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2020). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). Gender Equality Index <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EE>

4 Eurostat (2020). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2020). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2020). Civic space monitor – Greece <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

7 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

8 Eurostat (2020) Gini Coefficient of equalized disposable income – EU- SILC Survey [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

9 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

10 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

11 Eurostat (2020) Unemployment by sex and age – monthly data <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

12 Ibid.

13 Eurostat (2020) Unemployment rates by sex, age and country of birth (%) <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

14 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

low-income households and households with children.<sup>15</sup> This is because a significant share of tax revenue continues to come from indirect taxation on consumption and employee-paid taxation on labour.<sup>16</sup> The reforms introduced in January 2020 increased personal disposable income by reducing income tax from 15% to 10%.<sup>17</sup> But a reduction of corporation tax to 24%,<sup>18</sup> a 5% reduction of employers' insurance contributions over four years and the slow phasing out of the solidarity levy<sup>19</sup> are, in the eyes of the NSG, constraining the capacity of the welfare and pension systems. These reductions follow years of decline in social protection expenditure as a share of GDP, from 21% in 2012 to 19% in 2018.<sup>20</sup> As a result, Greece ranks the lowest of the EU member states on the Global Social Mobility Index 2020,<sup>21</sup> at 48th, cementing persistent inequalities.

Within this context of inequality, improving gender disparities is not on the current Greek government's agenda, despite Greece standing last in the European Gender Equality Index.<sup>22</sup> The gender employment gap is still 20%, and no update has been provided on the gender pay gap since 2014, when it was 12.5%.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the NSG reports that gender equality is receiving increased attention. Existing policies include respect of the right to parental leave in the employment law, the EUR 30.8 million Women Entrepreneurship Programme,<sup>24</sup> and 211 municipalities adopting the European Charter for Equality.<sup>25</sup> The 2019 law on the Promotion of substantive gender equality, prevention and fight against gender-based violence introduces certain advances in the fight against discrimination, despite still falling short of EU acquis.<sup>26</sup>

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Greece responded rapidly, deploying unprecedented measures. Yet the Commission forecasts a significant economic impact, with a temporary rise in unemployment to 19.9% that threatens recent improvements.<sup>27</sup> The Greek government has mobilised EUR 5.9 billion as part of its immediate fiscal response to reduce the socio-economic impact.<sup>28</sup> Most of these efforts have been directed towards supporting recently-suspended employees, covering social security contributions, extending unemployment benefits and supporting public servants who work in healthcare.

15 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

16 European Commission (2020) Taxation Trends in the European Union: Data for the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway 2020 Edition. [https://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/sites/taxation/files/taxation\\_trends\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/sites/taxation/files/taxation_trends_report_2020.pdf)

17 Kathimerini (2019) Increases in salaries and pensions in 2020 due to tax cuts <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1058106/gallery/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/ay3hseis-se-mis8oys-kai-synta3eis-to-2020-logw-meiwshs-forologias>

18 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

19 Kathimerini (2019) Reduction of insurance contributions by 5% over a period of four years <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1056294/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/meiwsh-asfaltistikwn-eisforwn-kata-5-se-va8os-tetraetias>

20 Eurostat (2020) General Government expenditure by Function (COFOG) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov\\_10a\\_exp/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en)

21 World Economic Forum (2020) The Global Social Mobility Report 2020: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/Global\\_Social\\_Mobility\\_Report.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/Global_Social_Mobility_Report.pdf)

22 European Institute for Gender Equality (2019) Gender Quality Index Score for Greece for 2019 <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/EL>

23 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

24 ESPA (2020) Women Entrepreneurship <https://www.espa.io/programmata/olokliromena/gunaikeia-epixeirhmatikothta/>

25 Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2019) 'Municipalities showing the registration for each Charter for Gender Equality in language societies (March 2019)' <http://www.isotita.gr/%CE%B4%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CF%80%CE%B-F%CF%85-%CE%AD%CF%87%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BD-%CF%85%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%88%CE%B5%CE%B9-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%81%CF%89%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%8A/>

26 Petoglou, Panagiota (2019) European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Flash Report: New Act 4604/2019 on substantive equality entered into force on 26 March 2019 <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4907-greece-new-act-4604-2019-on-substantive-equality-entered-into-force-on-26-march-2019-pdf-102-kb>

27 European Commission (2020) Council Recommendation on the 2020 National Reform Programme of Greece and delivering a Council opinion on the 2020 Stability Programme of Greece <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0508&from=EN>

28 Bruegel (2020) Bruegel Dataset: The Fiscal response to the economic fallout from the coronavirus. <https://www.bruegel.org/publications/datasets/covid-national-dataset/#greece>

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Greece continues to be the main recipient of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe from the Mediterranean. With 122,000 refugees settling in the country since 2015-2016,<sup>29</sup> non-EU migrants now make up 8.7% of the population.<sup>30</sup> The educational and equal-opportunities aims in the social development axis of the National Development Plans for 2021-2025<sup>31</sup> prove that the government has recognised this demographic change. These goals have been made more concrete by the short- and long-term social and economic inclusion measures in the National Integration Plan launched in July 2019.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting on these developments, the NSG stresses how this is a step towards recognising the importance of migrants and refugees for Greece.

Integration efforts carried out by the Greek authorities revolve around counselling, psychological support and improving access to the labour market. The NSG indicates that the latter is of special importance to the Greek government, as public action towards such integration is motivated by an understanding of employment as an essential guarantee of integration and self-reliance. These policies and initiatives depend on the EUR 328.3 million allocated to Greece for 2014-2020 by the EU's Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF).<sup>33</sup> They are implemented with the collaboration of regional and municipal authorities, NGOs, civil society organisations and international institutions such as UNHCR and the IOM.

### GOOD PRACTICE REFU-AID

The project Refu-aid<sup>34</sup>, carried out by Perichoresis, provides financial support within a period of five years for housing and vocational training for refugees away from the precariousness of the migration camps. Starting from a notion that integration requires more than three years of work, the project slowly allows refugees to become self-sufficient and participate in Greek society, whilst supporting the local Greek communities to contribute to this process.

Despite its positive remarks about the impact of these initiatives, the NSG signals a need to focus more on improving access to basic needs and accommodation. The main weakness of the Greek integration plans is their overreliance on employment for success, given the country's already weak labour market. More initiatives are needed to stimulate a welcoming societal context and change local attitudes to migration and asylum seekers, as such efforts can increase migrants' and asylum seekers' social and economic participation.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, recent adjacent policy developments reported by the NSG seem to be at odds with these integration plans. From 2019, the Ministry of Labour has only issued temporary insurance numbers for this vulnerable group,<sup>36</sup> hindering their access to essential social

29 UNHCR (2020) Fact Sheet: Greece (1-30 June 2020) <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/78115>

30 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

31 Ministry of Development and Investment (2020) Development Objectives of the National Development Plans and their specialisation in priorities <http://www.opengov.gr/ypoian/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/a3.pdf>

32 Ministry of Immigration Policy (2019) National Strategy for Integration

33 European Commission (2019) Managing Migration: EU Financial Support to Greece (February 2019) [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201902\\_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201902_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece_en.pdf)

34 Perichoresis (2020) Projects <https://www.perichoresis.ngo/en/projects/>

35 Hynie, Michaela (2018) Refugee Integration: Research and Policy <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2018-39059-002.pdf>

36 Angelidis, Dimitris (2020) Temporary AMKA for refugees [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaionomata/229872\\_prosorinos-amka-gia-prosfyges](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaionomata/229872_prosorinos-amka-gia-prosfyges)

benefits and their insertion into the labour market. In 2020, the Expert Council on NGO Law and the European Commission, amongst other international bodies, criticised the Ministry of Migration Policy's introduction of unnecessary registration procedures based on vague criteria and costly procedures for NGOs to receive mandatory accreditation. These international bodies said these changes would reduce the provision of essential services for refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the conservative New Democracy government has reduced the reception period from 6 months to 30 days, after which refugees and asylum seekers are obliged to transition from reception facilities to independent living. As they do not have access to the welfare system or income of their own, according to UNHCR, this decision will lead them into homelessness and poverty.<sup>38</sup>

## EDUCATION

The public education system in Greece continues to present several structural deficiencies. In the context of a sustained decrease in education expenditure, from 4.5% of GDP in 2013 to 3.9 in 2018,<sup>39</sup> both the NSG and the European Commission are concerned about the lack of staff. The recruitment of permanent teachers in the public system was frozen in 2008,<sup>40</sup> leading to a reliance on substitute teachers. They must cover several subjects simultaneously in

certain rural areas without sufficient teaching staff,<sup>41</sup> and this has been identified as one of the main causes of the decreasing quality of education. Furthermore, the constant policy changes, especially in the examination system,<sup>42</sup> are still not addressing a lack of focus on digital education or the skills mismatch.<sup>43</sup>

As a result, students are reporting increasing difficulties in focusing and a low level of satisfaction with the system,<sup>44</sup> as reported by the NSG, and they also face a more difficult transition from education to work. Recent graduates who have completed secondary education are reported to be employed at a rate of 57.7%, while for those transitioning out of higher education the rate is 48.7%<sup>45</sup>, compared to the average employment rate of 61.2%.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, almost one in five 15-year-old early school dropouts continues to have reading difficulties and rarely manages to improve.

Nevertheless, the early dropout rate in Greece is much lower than the EU average, as reported by the NSG. The Greek figure has been improving since 2008 and currently stands at 4.1%.<sup>47</sup> The dropout patterns closely resemble those in the rest of the EU: they usually occur in secondary school and affect male students more often. Nevertheless, the reporting done through the framework of the National Policy Plan for the Reduction of School Dropouts in

37 Refugees Legal Support (2020) Joint Letter to Greek Authorities: implement recommendations made by Expert Council on NGO Law. <https://www.refugeelegalsupport.org/single-post/2020/07/10/Joint-letter-to-Greek-authorities-implement-recommendations-made-by-Expert-Council-on-NGO-Law>

38 UNHCR (2020) Briefing Note: Greece must ensure safety net and integration opportunities for refugees <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/6/5ed603924/greece-must-ensure-safety-net-integration-opportunities-refugees-unhcr.html>

39 Eurostat (2020) General Government expenditure by Function (COFOG) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov\\_10a\\_exp/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en)

40 Euronews (2019) Over 3,000 Greek primary school teachers clash with police over public-sector hiring reforms <https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/14/over-3-000-greek-primary-school-teachers-clash-with-police-over-public-sector-hiring-reform>

41 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

42 Enikos (2019) "Locks" the new examination system for admission to universities - What changes is planned by the Ministry of Education <https://www.enikos.gr/society/689645/kleidonei-to-neo-exetastiko-systima-eisagogis-sta-aei-poiies-allag>

43 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

44 Kokkevi, Anna; Fotiou, Tasos; Stavrou, Myrto; Kanavou, Eleftheria; and Richardson, Clive (2019) Panhellenic research on adolescents' health-related behaviors (HBSC / WHO research) <https://www.epipsi.gr/index.php/research/97-ereuna-hbcs-who>

45 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

46 Eurostat (2020) Employment – annual statistics [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment\\_-\\_annual\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_-_annual_statistics)

47 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

Greece 2014-2020<sup>48</sup> provides data showing that this improvement is not uniform across Greece. Rural areas account for four out of 10 early dropouts, and they present higher dropout rates than urban areas, except for Athens and the Attica prefecture.<sup>49</sup> Progress in addressing this problem is still limited.<sup>50</sup>

### WORKING CONDITIONS, PRECARIOUSNESS AND THE BRAIN DRAIN

The NSG reports inconsistencies between the legal framework that upholds standard labour rights and recurrent negligent labour practices due to a lack of legal enforcement and insufficient oversight capacity. Following an increase in auditing staff since 2018 and a nationwide inspection conducted by the Ministry of Labour in 2019,<sup>51</sup> one in four employees was found to be uninsured or working more hours than reported by employers.<sup>52</sup> Despite the high fines for such actions, one

in four employees performs undeclared work, mostly in the catering sector.<sup>53</sup> Another issue the NSG is worried about is the extent of precariousness. The trend towards flexibilization and the overrepresentation of part-time employment, especially amongst young people, are seen as linked to the deconstruction of the labour market and an increase in attempts to circumvent regulations.<sup>54</sup> Among workers with temporary contracts, the main reason to continue for over 60% is the lack of access to a more secure employment contract.<sup>55</sup> This is a significant concern, given that part-time workers face a higher rate of being at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE) than workers on permanent contracts in Greece.<sup>56</sup>

The combination of these employment trends, high levels of youth unemployment and an increase in feelings of frustration amongst young people<sup>57</sup> explains the extent of the brain drain, as reported by the NSG. Since 2010, 530,000 young Greeks have sought employment opportunities abroad.<sup>58</sup>

48 Ministry of Education and Religions (2015) National Policy Plan for the Reduction of School Dropouts in Greece 2014-2020 <https://bit.ly/2XHQeH0>

49 OECD (2018) Reviews of National Policies for Education: Education for a Bright Future in Greece <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264298750-en.pdf?expires=1596724579&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=F9AAFB-500064C56A7E09EB1B63F28903>

50 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

51 Eifemerida (2019) "Safari" checks by the Ministry of Labor: 1,120 raids by inspectors in 8 days <https://www.iefimerida.gr/tag/anasfalisti-ergasia>

52 Fakalis, Timos (2019) Northern Greece: Undeclared work for 1 in 4 Employees -Champions in cafes-bars [https://www.ethnos.gr/oikonomia/51912\\_boreia-ellada-mayri-ergasia-gia-1-stoys-4-ergazomenoys-protathlites-ta-kafe-mpar](https://www.ethnos.gr/oikonomia/51912_boreia-ellada-mayri-ergasia-gia-1-stoys-4-ergazomenoys-protathlites-ta-kafe-mpar)

53 Fakalis, Timos (2019) Northern Greece: Undeclared work for 1 in 4 Employees -Champions in cafes-bars [https://www.ethnos.gr/oikonomia/51912\\_boreia-ellada-mayri-ergasia-gia-1-stoys-4-ergazomenoys-protathlites-ta-kafe-mpar](https://www.ethnos.gr/oikonomia/51912_boreia-ellada-mayri-ergasia-gia-1-stoys-4-ergazomenoys-protathlites-ta-kafe-mpar)

54 Papadakis, Nikos; Drakaki, Maria; Saridaki, Sofia; Dafermos, Vassilis (2020) Precarious Work and Youth, in Greece: theoretical and definitional insights and critical notes on the international-national state of play and the impact of precariousness in young people's life course and political behaviour <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/133a93dd-8821-48f0-a341-03c1853f05e0.pdf>

55 Ibid.

56 Eurofound (2020) Labour market change: Trends and policy approaches towards flexibilization. [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef19034en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef19034en.pdf)

57 Papadakis, Nikos; Drakaki, Maria; Saridaki, Sofia; Dafermos, Vassilis (2020) Precarious Work and Youth, in Greece: theoretical and definitional insights and critical notes on the international-national state of play and the impact of precariousness in young people's life course and political behaviour

58 Balis, Dimitris (2020) Greek immigrants: How many and who left, where they went, how many return [https://www.huffington-post.gr/entry/ellines-metanastes-erevna\\_gr\\_5e65dab9c5b60557280743e6](https://www.huffington-post.gr/entry/ellines-metanastes-erevna_gr_5e65dab9c5b60557280743e6)

# SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION

High tax rates, high unemployment, precariousness and low salaries are taking a toll on living conditions, according to the NSG. Even after a slight decrease since 2015, Greece's 2019 AROPE rate was 30%, only surpassed in the EU by Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>59</sup>

Yet some improvements have been effective and are starting to show in the capacity of the welfare system to address poverty, the NSG indicates. Social transfers lowered the AROPE rate to 17.9% in 2019, compared to 23.1% in 2012, at the height of the economic crisis.<sup>60</sup> With the support of EUR 4 billion from the EU Structural Funds allocated to Greece for 2014-2020,<sup>61</sup> the Greek government is continuing its existing poverty prevention policies, mainly through the provision of shelter and personalised job counselling.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the NSG also points out that the poverty threshold has been lowered, leaving out some who would previously have been considered at risk.

Access to affordable housing is a significant concern, as house prices and rent have increased, more prominently so in the urban areas, according to the NSG. In Athens, house prices have gone up by 4.2% in 2018 and rent by 17%.<sup>63</sup> Monthly rents in the Greek

capital average between EUR 600 and EUR 800 (while an average salary is EUR 1,000 per month), similar to the levels before the financial crisis, because of an increase in properties being dedicated to short-term rental through the Airbnb platform.<sup>64</sup> As a result, 40% of households in Greece are dedicating more than 40% of their income to housing costs.<sup>65</sup> Access to housing is more troubling for low-income households and vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, and Roma, many of whom are already living in inadequate conditions,<sup>66</sup> the NSG reports. Greece still does not have a public housing scheme that provides permanent solutions,<sup>67</sup> though it is currently developing a strategy to prevent and combat homelessness and housing exclusion.<sup>68</sup>

With the re-introduction in 2016 of a free and accessible healthcare system,<sup>69</sup> Greece marked a shift from health expenditure cuts that had resulted from austerity measures, the NSG signals. The NSG especially welcomes the launch of Local Health Teams to improve access to such public services, which have been key in providing support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet the NSG is cautious about these improvements, as it reports that the public health system is not fit to cover the

59 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

60 Hellenic Statistical Authority (2020) Living Conditions in Greece: 3 July 2020 [https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/16865455/LivingConditionsInGreece\\_0720.pdf/98946bf3-eab4-05b5-65b4-9942bf129813](https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/16865455/LivingConditionsInGreece_0720.pdf/98946bf3-eab4-05b5-65b4-9942bf129813)

61 European Commission (2014) Press Release: European Commission adopts 'Partnership Agreement' with Greece on using EU Structural and Investment Funds for growth and jobs in 2014-2020 [http://www.esfhellas.gr/Lists/Custom\\_Announcements/Attachments/119/DELTIQ%20TYPOU%20EN.pdf](http://www.esfhellas.gr/Lists/Custom_Announcements/Attachments/119/DELTIQ%20TYPOU%20EN.pdf)

62 Organisation of Employability of Human Resources (2020) Staff Recruitment services <http://www.oaed.gr/programmata-proslepses-prosopikou>

63 Ipaidia (2019). Εκτόξευση των ενοικίων στην Ελλάδα λόγω Airbnb: <https://www.ipaidia.gr/eidiseis/ektokseusi-ton-enoiki-on-stin-ellada-logo-airbnb>

64 Roussanaglou, Nikos (2020) Rents in Athens rise to prohibitive levels <https://www.ekathimerini.com/249856/article/ekathimerini/business/rents-in-athens-rise-to-prohibitive-levels>

65 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

66 Ziomas, Dimitris; Konstantinidou, Danai; Capella, Antoinetta; and Vezyrgianni, Katerina (2019) National Strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion: Greece <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21603&langId=en>

67 European Commission (2020) Country Report Greece 2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0507&from=EN>

68 Ziomas, Dimitris; Konstantinidou, Danai; Capella, Antoinetta; and Vezyrgianni, Katerina (2019) National Strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion: Greece <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21603&langId=en>

69 European Commission (2016) Law 4368/2016, Article 33 on free access to health care services <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/law-4368/2016-article-33-on-free-access-to-health-care-services>

needs of the population. Despite registering improvements in the overall health of the population,<sup>70</sup> Greece still has one of the highest rates of self-reported unmet needs for medical care, at 8.1%.<sup>71</sup> Given that 36% of the total health-care system is funded by out-of-pocket expenditure, largely via co-payments,<sup>72</sup> a rate which has been rising since 2016,<sup>73</sup> the NSG reports a general reluctance among the population to access primary health services and concerns over equal access. The 2019 reforms introduce a favourable settlement of 2013-2019 debts, a faster recruitment of health staff and improvements in the monthly compensation of family doctors,<sup>74</sup> but they do not tackle the structural deficiencies mentioned above. In addition, the NSG reports that refugees and asylum seekers still face language and administrative obstacles, especially related to temporary social security numbers. These problems are yet to be addressed, despite their typically poor state of health due to their journeys to Greece and

time spent in refugee camps. Given this situation and the additional pressure brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, the government intends to draw up a plan for a new national health system in the wake of the pandemic.<sup>75</sup>

To transition towards a green economy, Greece presented the National Energy and Climate Plan in December 2019,<sup>76</sup> having received strategic support from the European Commission.<sup>77</sup> Amongst other goals, the NSG specifically reports on lignite-extraction regions such as Western Macedonia: targeted actions would reduce its dependency, finance the development of cleaner forms of energy and improve living conditions in urban areas.<sup>78</sup> Through open public consultations, the government intends to introduce plans to prevent energy poverty, strengthen the circular economy and develop green-employment and re-skilling programmes. These will need to use the Just Transition Fund.<sup>79</sup>

70 Hellenic Statistical Authority (2020) Living Conditions in Greece: 3 July 2020 [https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/16865455/LivingConditionsInGreece\\_0720.pdf/98946bf3-eab4-05b5-65b4-9942bf129813](https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/16865455/LivingConditionsInGreece_0720.pdf/98946bf3-eab4-05b5-65b4-9942bf129813)

71 European Commission (2020) Social Scoreboard <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/explorer>

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74 Forin (2019) Law 4647/2019 (Government Gazette A '204 / 16.12.2019) Urgent regulations of competence of the Ministries of Health, Interior, Labor and Social Affairs and other provisions. <https://www.forin.gr/laws/law/3811/nomos-4647-2019>

75 CNN Greece (2020) Mitsotakis: We will build the new National Health System <https://www.cnn.gr/politiki/story/220748/mitso-takis-tha-ftiaxoyme-to-neo-ethniko-systima-ygeias>

76 Ministry of the Environment and Energy (2019) National Energy and Climate Plan [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/el\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/el_final_necp_main_en.pdf)

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79 Ministry of the Environment and Energy (2019) National Energy and Climate Plan [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/el\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/el_final_necp_main_en.pdf)

# CIVIC SPACE

Civic space in Greece has narrowed, according to the CIVICUS Monitor.<sup>80</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that this is because of developments concerning the freedom of association and assembly.

The New Democracy government introduced additional registration procedures for NGOs providing support for asylum seekers and migrants, and it limited activity in the field to only those that have been approved. Not only are these organisations asked to register, but information about members, employees and associates must be provided as part of the procedure.<sup>81</sup> Given the ongoing New Democracy government's negative feeling towards asylum-support NGOs, the Expert Council on NGO Law and other organisations have condemned the new administrative procedure. They say that it worsens the humanitarian crisis and limits the freedom of association, disproportionately affecting smaller NGOs that do not have adequate financial capability.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the NSG records that a controversial law approved in July 2020 restricting public outdoor assemblies is several questions regarding the freedom of peaceful assembly.<sup>83</sup> Despite the Ministry of Citizen Protection justifying the bill as a mean to safeguard public

health, Amnesty International has expressed concerns over the notification requirements, the methods to disperse peaceful assembly, and provisions that hold organisers liable for the actions of individual protestors.<sup>84</sup> The NSG reported opposition, including a petition to stop the rules applying to unions and opposition parties, given concerns over how the new measures will affect free public debate.<sup>85 86</sup>

Other factors limiting free speech, according to the NSG, include Increasing attacks on journalists covering the situation in refugee camps, and a lack of clarity in the distribution between media of funds to pay for public information advertisements.<sup>87</sup>

Despite civil society organisations (CSOs) being actively involved in social dialogue in Greece, the NSG is concerned that their voices are rarely heard. These concerns result from their exclusion from the design of new laws and from reviews of implementation: CSOs' opinions are only sought after a plan has been settled. The NSG requests that CSOs be included in the design of proposals for regulations, policies and programmes on an equal footing to international organisations such as UNCHR and IOM (International Organization for Migration).

80 CIVICUS (2020) CIVICUS Monitor: Greece <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

81 Ibid.

82 Nielsen, Nikolaj (2020) New Greek rules stigmatise NGOs working with migrants [https://euobserver.com/migration/148530?utm\\_source=euobs&utm\\_medium=email](https://euobserver.com/migration/148530?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email)

83 Kathimerini (2020) The bill on demonstrations was voted in favor <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1086808/article/epikairothta/politikh/yperyhfishke-to-nomosxedio-gia-tis-diadhlwseis>

84 Amnesty International (2020) Greece: Amnesty International Statement on Bill of the Ministry of Citizen Protection: 'Public Outdoor Assemblies and Other provisions' <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2527062020ENGLISH.pdf>

85 Avgi (2020) GSEVEE opposes the bill for the marches and demonstrations, demands its withdrawal <http://www.avgi.gr/artikle/10811/11264501/antithete-e-gsebee-sto-nomoschedio-gia-tis-poreies-kai-tis-diadloseis-zeta-ten-aposyrse-tou#>

86 Kathimerini (2020) The bill on demonstrations was voted in favor <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1086808/article/epikairothta/politikh/yperyhfishke-to-nomosxedio-gia-tis-diadhlwseis>

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## COMPARISON TO THE COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2020 country-specific recommendations for Greece mostly concern measures to combat the economic impact of Covid-19, but they also include measures to tackle persistent issues. Given the potential for further growth in already-existing disparities – both internal and between Greece and other EU member states – the European Commission welcomes the strengthening of the social safety net and the healthcare system, along with further measures targeting the most vulnerable.

A significant focus of the recommendations is better access to social protection for the most vulnerable people, which would address the concerns raised by the National Strategy Group. While approving of the increase in the healthcare budget and staff, the Commission insists that access barriers be addressed to avoid an increase in the risk of unmet medical needs, especially during a pandemic. It calls on Greece to reassess direct and informal payment and co-payment methods and to develop targeted healthcare measures for migrants, asylum seekers and low-income households. These concerns are in line with those of the NSG. The Commission also points out the need for additional measures to improve access to employment for young people and women, particularly through skills development and training programmes. Other recommendations, such as to improve access to affordable housing, are seen by the NSG as the best way to address in-work and energy poverty.

To address these accessibility concerns, the Commission recommends both introducing a minimum-income scheme and encouraging the participation of CSOs in the design and implementation of targeted measures. This corresponds to the NSG's requests to reduce the AROPE rate and improve social dialogue.

For the first time since 2014, the recommendations for Greece include employment protection measures. While the Commission indicates that more support is needed for teleworking and flexible working conditions, it also recommends tackling undeclared work. This could be a start towards ensuring quality employment and supporting better enforcement of labour standards, in line with the reporting of the NSG.

Yet there are divergences between the Commission recommendations and the NSG report. First, the Commission suggests limiting work hours to preserve employment, while the NSG highlights the links between part-time contracts and deteriorations in living conditions and in social mobility. Second, the NSG thinks that approval of tax deferrals could further weaken the welfare state in the long run and increase pressure on the most vulnerable, as it might lead to a decline in social expenditure. Lastly, the Commission's recommendations address neither gender-equality issues such as the gender pay and employment gaps, nor how to improve standard working conditions.

SOLIDAR's Social Rights Monitor 2020 has been developed in the framework of the Together for Social Europe programme co-funded by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). It provides an insight into the state of social rights in 17 European countries. The Monitor assesses the state of social Europe in terms of equality of opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection, inclusion and civic space based on the observations of Civil Society Organisations working on the ground in combination with statistical data and scientific findings. It does so on the basis of observations of National Strategy Groups set up in each of these countries by a SOLIDAR member or partner. The 2020 Monitor also analyses to what extent these aspects are reflected in the Country Specific Recommendations of the European Semester process towards a socially sustainable recovery after the Covid-19 crisis.

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SOLIDAR is a European Network of more than 50 Civil Society organisations who gather several millions of citizens throughout Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the values of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the three main policy sectors: social affairs, international cooperation and lifelong learning.

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