

Social Rights Monitor

2021

Country Monitor: Greece



Hard hit by the 2008 financial crisis, Greece slowly began to recover in 2018, after a 10-year economic crisis that turned the country in a difficult place to live, study, and work. Many Greeks workers were left without a job; the country came to have Europe's greatest income inequalities; and regional and gender gaps led many people to leave the country. The pandemic created a new multi-level crisis, the effects of which, although not yet fully measurable, have already left their marks on economic and social life. Unemployment rates remain around 10 percentage points higher than the European average, and the Gini coefficient indicates ever-growing income inequalities. Moreover, SOLIDAR's Greek National Strategy Group (NSG) reports strong negative consequences on the country's education systems, particularly due to the increasing public funds that are allocated to private education providers. High rates of youth unemployment led to a "brain drain", which the government is trying to counter through salary incentives to encourage Greek people to return from abroad.

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	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
GINI index¹	32.3	31.0	31.1	30.2 (2019)
Unemployment²	19.3%	17.3%	16.3%	7.0%
Gender Equality Index³	50.0 (2017)	51.2	52.2 (2021)	67.9
In-work poverty⁴	10.9%	10.1%	9.8%	9.2% (2019)
Housing Overcrowding⁵	29.2%	28.7%	29.1%	17.1% (2019)
CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor⁶	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

WORKING CONDITIONS AND PRECARIOUSNESS

Although Greece has recently been on a slight recovery trend from the 2012 economic crisis, its gross domestic product fell 7.9% in 2020 from the previous year.⁷ The pandemic worsened participation in the already-fragile Greek labour market, and the unemployment rate – which reached 16.3% in 2020 – remains the highest in Europe.⁸ **Inequalities persist in**

the labour market, since unemployment continues mainly to affect vulnerable social groups. It is higher among women, among young people aged 15 to 24, and in some geographical areas – mainly in the Western Greece region.⁹ Confirming a trend experienced by other European countries throughout 2020, Greece registered a significant drop in the number of employees, while the number of self-employed workers grew. In addition, a large proportion of workers

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Greece: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

7 EURES (2021) Labour Market Information – Greece: <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=2589&country-Id=GR&acro=Imi&lang=en>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

faced a suspension of their contracts for more than three months, which caused their monthly salaries to fall by an average of half.¹⁰ As a consequence, an unprecedented conversion from full-time to part-time contracts took place. In general terms, the average monthly salary was reduced by 10% compared with the previous year, leading to financial difficulties for many people. The pandemic did not only affect salaries and incomes, but it also forced many workers to transition to online and other solutions in order to work from home. Many employees in Greece work in the service sector (23%), so this resulted in increased working hours and a heavier workload, and around 60% of workers said they worked more than 40 hours per week. Nevertheless, precarious contracts, increased workload, and growing unemployment rates do not seem to affect the Greek population equally. The number of low-income households (with an income below 60% of the median) increased by 1.5% from 2019, while the number of households with an annual income of more than €30,000 also increased – from 5.8% in 2019, to 6.7% in 2020.¹¹ SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group is therefore particularly worried by widening income inequalities, which disrupt cohesion and foster social injustice.

In June 2021, under great criticism from unions and workers, the government passed the new Labour Law 4808/2021.¹² While members of the Greek parliament were adopting this reform, strikes and demonstrations unfolded against it in the streets. The reform covers working conditions and mainly concerns the introduction of more flexible working hours and

ways of working. The most contested measure makes it possible for employees to work longer days without receiving more pay in exchange for time off in the same week. The main criticism from the Greek trade unions confederation GSEE is that the law would introduce the logic of “more work, less pay, no protection”,¹³ as it would let employers force employees to work overtime with a day off instead of proper compensation.

GENDER EQUALITY

Inequalities between women and men are still a very pertinent factor in Greece. They affect people's everyday lives and hinder equal opportunities and fair access to the labour market, employment contracts, and equitable salaries. The annual report of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) ranks Greece last among European countries in gender equality. Moreover, it has ranked last for a decade now, meaning that not much effort has been made since 2010 to develop effective policies. **In the labour market, women are overrepresented among holders of part-time contracts: the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment is 31.4% for women.**¹⁴ **This data is mirrored in monthly earnings that are an average of 200 points lower for women in terms of purchasing power standard (PPS).**¹⁵ Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that women are the ones taking care of young children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. They also do 85.3% of housework, indicating huge gender

10 Kousta, E., (2021) Greece: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/other/2021/working-life-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-2020#wp-103877>

11 Kousta, E., (2021) Greece: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/other/2021/working-life-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-2020#wp-103877>

12 Law 4808/2021: https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/54940/o-neos-nomos-48082021-gia-ta-ergasiaka-dhmosieyohke-sto-fek?fbclid=IwAR24C3E08IBZ56v70Y8DKq02jWyrfYq1jaACydZq_olJeiN-hRuhpcP2yh1

13 The Guardian (2021) Controversial new labour laws set to shake up working life in Greece: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/17/greece-controversial-new-labour-law-reform-shake-up-working-life>

14 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Greece: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

15 Expressing income in PPS (Purchasing Power Standard) allows to account for differences in currency among European Member states.

inequalities in the time spent on care and domestic activities.¹⁶ Parental leave in Greece is unpaid, presenting households with a difficult choice. The parent with the highest salary – usually a man – continues to work.¹⁷ Gender balance is not a reality across the political and economic spheres either: women are under-represented as government ministers (82.4% are men), members of parliament (81.1% are men), and members of regional assemblies (78.8% are men). The gap gets even wider on large companies' boards, where 90% of members are men.¹⁸ Similar numbers are found in public institutions, such as research-funding and broadcasting organisations, where 84% are men.

INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

After 2015, when migratory flows towards Europe increased, Greece made some small steps forward to ensure equal rights and opportunities in society for migrants and refugees. Possibly due to the pandemic, land and sea arrivals declined sharply in 2020 to 15,669 from 74,613 in 2019.¹⁹ The National Strategy Group reports that several emergency projects have been adopted over the last five years, aimed at protecting migrant people and providing inclusion for children and other vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, the Migrant Integration Policy Index for 2020 finds that the Greek system of reception and protection still generates more

obstacles than benefits for inclusion. The main obstacles are in education, access to citizenship, and political participation.²⁰ The National Strategy Group confirms the data. It also reports that **migrants and refugees face notable delays in obtaining a social security number, which not only hinders their full access to healthcare, but also prevents them from accessing the labour market, leading to illegal labour and employment relations.**

Moreover, SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group identifies a worrying, radical change in Greece's approach towards migrant and refugee inclusion. This approach tries to represent Greece as unsafe and unwelcoming for migrants, with the aim of discouraging them from coming to the country. Greece recently added Turkey to its list of countries to which it is safe to send back migrants,²¹ and it has started increasingly to reject migrants and apply push-back measures at its borders. Greek border forces were reported to use tear gas, water cannons, and even plastic bullets against people attempting to cross.²² Other abuses have included excessive use of force and beatings, as well as systematic unnecessary detention. Breaching the principle of non-refoulement, Greece even temporarily suspended asylum requests on 2 March 2020.²³ A joint declaration published in February 2021 and signed by six national CSOs operating in the fields of inclusion and migration²⁴ called for an immediate ban on pushbacks at the Turkish border. It said that these violate human rights, as well as Greek and international law.²⁵

16 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Greece: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

17 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in Greece? <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/who-eligible-parental-leave-greece>

18 Ibid.

19 Amnesty International (2021) Greece 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/greece/report-greece/>

20 MIPEX (2021) MIPEX 2020 – Greece: <https://www.mipex.eu/greece>

21 MacGregor, M (2021) Greece: More asylum seekers could be sent back to Turkey under government plan. (InfoMigrants): <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/32805/greece-more-asylum-seekers-could-be-sent-back-to-turkey-under-government-plan>

22 Amnesty International (2021) Greece 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/greece/report-greece/>

23 Act on the “Suspension of the submission of asylum applications”: <http://www.immigration.gr/2020/03/pnp-anastolh-ths-ypovolis-aithseon-asylo.html?m=1>

24 Joint Statement on push backs practices in Greece (2021): https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/JOINT_STATEMENT_GR_NGOS.pdf

25 Ibid.

On the other hand, some successful programmes have been developed or prolonged to provide support to newcomers in Greece. In particular, the ESTIA programme²⁶ provides accommodation, psychological support, and inclusion activities. Launched and operated by the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR, the programme has now been taken over by the Greek government as ESTIA II.²⁷ In addition, the programme Stegasi kai Ergasia – shelter and work – has been transformed by Law 4756/2020²⁸ into a stable programme for vulnerable groups facing homelessness. Civil society organisations working with the homeless welcomed this with enthusiasm, as a good example of the transformation of a proven good practice into a long-term, sustainable programme.

THE BRAIN DRAIN

The brain-drain phenomenon, when highly trained or qualified people leave a country, has been widespread in Greece over the last

decade. Since 2010, around 400,000 people have left the country, of whom 69% held a master's or a PhD diploma and 26% another kind of university degree.²⁹ They mainly move to other European countries, looking for a better employment match for their education. The brain drain also constitutes an accelerating demographic threat for Greek society. As young people leave, the population is aging at high speed.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the restrictions imposed by European governments to contain the spread of coronavirus had a strong impact on migratory flows, which decreased dramatically. In these circumstances, **the Greek government adopted some new measures to try to keep highly skilled workers in the country and welcome back some people who had previously emigrated.** The Greek authorities recently launched a “Rebrain Greece” programme – a wage subsidy scheme offering high and competitive salaries to scientists, experts, and researchers willing to return to Greece to work.³⁰

26 UNHCR, Estia Programme: <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/>

27 UNHCR (2020) Towards ESTIA II. UNHCR welcomes Greece's commitment to ensure the continuation of flagship reception programme for asylum-seekers: <https://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/15985-towards-estia-ii-unhcr-welcomes-greeces-commitment-to-ensure-the-continuation-of-flagship-reception-programme-for-asylum-seekers.html>

28 Law 4756/2020 - Government Gazette 235 / A / 26-11-2020 (Codified): Measures to support workers and vulnerable social groups, social security regulations and provisions to help the unemployed: <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ergasia-koinonike-asphalise/nomos-4756-2020-phek-235a-26-11-2020.html>

29 Papakonstantinou, K., (2021) Discussing the Brain Drain, London School of Economics: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/greeceatlse/2021/03/10/discussing-the-brain-drain/>

30 Rebrain Greece: <https://platform.rebraingreece.gr/en/>

Social protection and inclusion

The Greek National Strategy Group reports that no data is yet available on the impact that the 2020 measures had on poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Nevertheless, the government adopted some measures to ease the economic and financial pressures on households and citizens. Social assistance support was mainly provided through one-off payments to specific target groups. While this has certainly helped some people in need, the call for more long-term support was not heard. Directed at self-employed workers,³¹ Law 4756/2020 provided a support payment of €600 in April 2020. Long-term unemployed workers could also benefit from a one-off payment of €400. To be eligible for this latter payment, people had to be unemployed and ineligible for any other unemployment benefit. However, the government has provided relatively little support.

Other categories of workers have been slightly more protected in 2021, and an ad-hoc measure was adopted in May 2020³² to help seasonal workers in the tourism and food industries who were not rehired in 2021 due to the pandemic lockdowns and closures. They were given an extraordinary two months' worth

of compensation – corresponding to the unemployment benefit – for January and February 2021. Moreover, beneficiaries of the “GMI” guaranteed minimum income saw their monthly benefit increased by €100 for each child, with a ceiling of €300. But this lasted for just two months.³³ **All these measures were welcomed by their beneficiaries, but they did not provide long-term, sustainable support.**

HOUSING MEASURES

The Greek government introduced a mandatory reduction in rent for some target groups, pioneering this measure in Europe. The reduction corresponded to 40% of monthly rent and was applicable from March to October 2020, with some extensions. People were entitled to the reduction if they were paying rent on a place of work, primary residence, or student accommodation.³⁴ According to the European Social Policy Network, this measure had a strong impact on renters throughout the country: in March 2020, 971,482 people benefited from this reduction.³⁵

31 The beneficiaries of this measure included self-employed economists, accountants, engineers, lawyers, doctors, teachers and researchers.

32 Έκτακτη αποζημίωση εποχικά εργαζόμενων του τουριστικού και εμπορικού κλάδου χωρίς δικαίωμα υποχρεωτικής επαναπρόσληψης / Extraordinary monthly compensation for seasonal workers : <https://www.gov.gr/ipiresies/ergasia-kai-asphalise/nergia/ektakte-meniaia-apozemiose-epokhika-ergazomenon>

33 Εφάπαξ έκτακτη εισοδηματική ενίσχυση / One-time special income support: <https://covid19.gov.gr/efapax-ektakti-isodimati-ki-enischysi-apo-100-eos-300-evro-se-dikeouchous-tou-elachistou-engyimenou-isodimatos-pou-ine-gonis-anilikon-teknon/>

34 Μείωση μισθώματος επαγγελματιών μισθώσεων, μισθώσεων κύριας κατοικίας και εξαρτημένων μελών φοιτητών: <https://covid19.gov.gr/proeretiki-miosi-misthomatos-epangelmatikon-misthoseon-misthoseon-kyrias-katikias-misthoseon-exartime-non-melon-fititon-ke-misthoseon-naftikon/>

35 ESPN (2021) Thematic report on social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis – Greece: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=10&advSearchKey=%20ESPN_covid2021&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0

Moreover, through the Γέφυρα – Yéphira, bridge – programme,³⁶ the government contributed to the payment of mortgages on the primary residences of vulnerable borrowers who have been affected financially by the pandemic. The amount varied according to income and assets but ranged up to 90% of the monthly instalment for a maximum of nine months.

EDUCATION

As in the rest of Europe and beyond, 2020 and 2021 were very difficult and peculiar years for both formal and nonformal education in Greece. Because of the pandemic, the majority of students and learners had to continue their education through online platforms and classes. **In Greece, as no public platforms were ready to meet the needs of online primary and secondary education, the government adopted Webex as the main platform.**³⁷ This is provided by a private American company that develops videoconferencing systems. In addition, several Greek education trade unions denounced an amendment adopted by the Greek Parliament without proper social dialogue consultations on the compulsory web streaming of classes and courses.³⁸ Despite their efforts, many students did not manage to follow online education, mainly due to gaps in digital skills or the lack of the necessary material and space.

Peculiar to Greece was the situation of migrant and refugee learners in refugee camps during the schools closure. Often lacking Internet access, they were provided with weekly homework assignments.

GOOD PRACTICE

“Larissa learning city”: teachers networking to support learning and inclusion for vulnerable migrants³⁹

The municipality of Larissa has been closely working with local civil society organisations to provide basic support for refugees living in the city and in the Koutsochero refugee camp. There, teachers provided extended support to students encountering significant challenges to access education on a daily basis. Mainly, the teachers translated information and adopted measures that had been written only in Greek. They helped children and students access online learning platforms, so that they could participate in distance education.

The National Strategy Group expresses its concerns over the Greek government’s choice to increasingly pay for private providers of vocational education. This promotes the growth of these providers,⁴⁰ while the country’s

36 Government Gazette 256 / AD / 23-12-2020 (Art. 82)

37 Ministry of Education, Circular Circular 15/9/202 121802 / DG4 - Instructions to Principals and Teachers of Primary and Secondary Education for modern distance education during the school year 2020-21: https://webex.sch.gr/docs/odigies_gia_tin_syghroni_ex_apostaseos_ekpsi.pdf

38 ETUCE (2020) Greece: Greek Government bypass social dialogue mechanisms and adopts regulation on live streaming delivery of lessons: <https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/news/member-organisations/3851-greece-greek-government-bypass-social-dialogue-mechanisms-and-adopts-regulation-on-live-streaming-delivery-of-lessons>

39 Deligiannis, D. Measures developed by cities for migrants and refugees during the COVID-19. The case of Larissa: <https://uil.unesco.org/system/files/larissa.pdf>

40 Ministry of Education (2020) Εκσυγχρονισμός της ιδιωτικής εκπαίδευσης και άλλες επείγουσες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας / Modernisation of private education and other urgent provisions of competence: https://www.esos.gr/sites/default/files/articles-legacy/_nomos_47132020.pdf

investment in public education in among the lowest in Europe as a proportion of GDP. Most worryingly, with the support of the right-wing Greek Solution Party, the Greek ruling party passed a law on 11 February 2021 that established a dedicated police section for public universities. The National Strategy Group denounces this law as a dramatic infringement of academic freedom and freedom of expression.

On the other hand, the National Strategy Group reports that nonformal education is widely managed by CSOs. These are mainly supporting migrant and refugee children through education activities and courses to promote child protection, empowerment, and employability. However, nonformal education also stopped during Greece's two lockdown periods.

Civic space

Civic space and liberties were much debated in 2020, due to the various restrictions imposed by the government to contain the spread of Covid-19. The National Strategy Group reports that freedom of association was generally respected and protected in Greece. However, **major concerns were raised over Ministerial Decision 3063/2020,⁴¹ which introduced strict requirements for the registration and certification of CSOs and NGOs working in migration and asylum.** The decision provides that, in order to continue their activities and operations, the organisations must apply for a certificate from the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection. The certificate is issued after an examination process, which analyses documents submitted by the organisations. According to the European Expert Council on NGO Law, the proposed requirements can be discriminatory.⁴² Organisations with longer activity track records will be at an advantage, as will those that can demonstrate their sustainability. But these provisions will put newer and smaller service providers at a disadvantage.

The National Strategy Group echoes these remarks and opposes the potential criminalisation of organisations carrying out humanitarian activities.

Moreover, such an important governmental decision should only have been adopted following an inclusive and participatory procedure, which did not take place. While some NGOs had the opportunity to submit an opinion, the timeline was extremely short for elaborate and relevant feedback⁴³ and no public consultation took place. This is particularly negative, as any regulation dealing with freedom of association should be adopted through a democratic and participatory procedure.

From mid-2020 to mid-2021, various public demonstrations took place in Greece, including some against any austerity measures that might be introduced. In Greece, as in other European countries, authorities often found the pandemic a reason to impose limitations on public gatherings and the right to demonstrate.

41 Ministerial Decision 3063/2020 / Καθορισμός λειτουργίας του «Μητρώου Ελληνικών και Ξένων Μη Κυβερνητικών Οργανώσεων (ΜΚΟ)» και του «Μητρώου Μελών Μη Κυβερνητικών Οργανώσεων (ΜΚΟ)», που δραστηριοποιούνται σε θέματα διεθνούς προστασίας, μετανάστευσης και κοινωνικής ένταξης εντός της Ελληνικής Επικράτειας: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12yuxqKCKFp5W9zz06wSjEJgYIM3aV5P9/view>

42 Expert Council on NGO Law (2020) Opinion on the compatibility with European standards of recent and planned amendments to the Greek legislation on NGO registration: <https://rm.coe.int/expert-council-conf-exp-2020-4-opinion-ngo-registration-greece/16809ee91d>

43 Ibid.

Legislative reforms regulating the right to demonstrate were carried out in July and September 2020.⁴⁴ While it is recognised that restrictions can be acceptable to curb the pandemic, it is nevertheless necessary to implement them with transparency, through clear criteria which meet the principles of necessity and proportionality. Amnesty International reported that these requirements were not met in Greece. One example is the use of force and subsequent detention by the police to stop demonstrations, which led people to incur a higher risk of contagion by gathering in small spaces.⁴⁵ There were also reports of the use of force and the dispersion of peaceful protests, with the police using water cannon and

chemical irritants against protesters.

In addition, the Greek government passed a controversial new law creating a dedicated police force for university campuses. The government presented it as a necessary measure to reduce crime on campuses, but the National Strategy Group – as well as students and academics – fear that this will hinder freedom of speech and academic freedom. The NSG stands against the introduction of police officers into universities, which should be places that foster freedom and critical thinking. CIVICUS Monitor therefore rates Greek civic space as “narrowed”.⁴⁶

Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

Following the emergency situation due to the coronavirus, the Greek government adopted measures without consulting social partners or other political forces. The National Strategy Group reports that the EU has requested that CSOs be involved in formal social dialogue procedures.⁴⁷ These are normally carried out through open public consultations and meetings, or by writing open letters to authorities. Nevertheless, throughout 2020 and in particular during the drafting of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, the impression was that, although CSOs should be invited to contribute to national planning and the design of policies, their input rarely had an impact.

44 Amnesty International (2021) Greece: Authorities abusing power to trample on right to protest: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/greece-authorities-abusing-power-to-trample-on-right-to-protest/>

45 Ibid.

46 CIVICUS (2021) Civicus Monitor – Greece: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

47 European Commission (2020) Commission Staff Working Document, Guidance to Member States - Recovery and Resilience Plans, (part 1, p. 33) : https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/recovery-and-resilience-task-force_en

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SOLIDAR is a European and worldwide network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. With over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), member organisations are national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

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