

## Peer Review on Children First – pilot local consultation platforms on child poverty (Brussels, 13-14 January 2015)

Greece<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. The context of Poverty and Child Poverty in Greece

The major economic crisis in Greece with the six years of recession has affected social situation and living conditions dramatically. Greece has experienced a year-on-year decrease of 10% in GDP between 2011-2012<sup>2</sup> and this decline came on top of the already existing deterioration under the previous years:

**Table1: GDP (2010)<sup>3</sup>– Annual growth rates (%) for the years 2007-2013**

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
3.5	-0.4	-4.4	-5.4	-8.9	-6.6	-3.9

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, October 2014

The **employment** rate (population aged 20-64) fell from 66.5% in 2008 to 52.9% in 2013 (the lowest in the EU), while the **unemployment** rate reached 27.3% in 2013, rising from 7.7% in 2008. The levels of the **youth unemployment** rates (from 21.9% in 2008 to 58.3% in 2013), as well as of the **long term unemployment** (3.6% in 2008 – 18.4% in 2013) remain extremely high, despite the fact that there are signs of stabilisation or even reduction of the figures in 2014: The unemployment rate was 25.5% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2014 compared to 27.2% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2013<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding the **number of people living in households with very low work intensity**, the figures speak for themselves: 7.4% in 2008, 11.8% in 2011, 14.1% in 2012 and **18.2% in 2013**.

As for **inequality, poverty and social exclusion**, the figures reveal the severity of the social situation. According to the most recent available statistical data, the rate of **people at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion** rose to 35.7% in 2013 from 28.1% in 2008<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion programme coordinated by ÖSB Consulting, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Applica, and funded by the European Commission.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Draft Joint Employment Report, Annex 1, 28.11.2014.

<sup>3</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, GDP Annual Growth Rates for the years 2007-2013. Revised data according to ESA 2010, Press Release 10.10.2014.

<sup>4</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, Press Release, LFS, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2014, 18.12.2014.

<sup>5</sup> The reference year is the previous calendar year from the one in which the survey was conducted.



**Table 2: People at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion<sup>6</sup>**

Year	Number of people	Percentage
2008		28.1%
2012	3,795,100	34.6%
2013	3,903,800	35.7%

Source: ELSTAT, Survey of Income and living conditions 2013, Press release 13.10.14

The course of the **material deprivation rate** depicts more prominently the sustained hardship hit upon large population groups, as the number of the severely deprived people rose by almost 930,000 between 2008 and 2012<sup>7</sup>, with more than half of them recorded in the 2011-2012 period. During the last 4 years (2010-2013) the increase in **severe material deprivation** is greater at ages 0-64 than those aged over 65. Specifically, in **2013, 20.3%** of the total population faces financial burden with an enforced lack of at least 4 out of potentially 9 material deprivation items, while this percentage was 19.5% in 2012, 15.2% in 2011, 11.6% in 2010 and **11.2% in 2008**.

It is also worth mentioning that **material deprivation concerns** not only the poor population, but also **part of the non-poor population**, as it is concluded by the study of Living Conditions indicators, given by the Hellenic Statistical Authority. For instance: 79.1% of the poor population and **39.1% of the non-poor population** report difficulties in facing **unexpected financial expenses** of approximately 550 euros. **Inability to keep their home adequately warm** declare **24.3%** of the **non-poor** population, while the corresponding percentage of the poor population is estimated at 48.6% and the percentage of the total population is 29.4%.<sup>8</sup>

Developments in **income inequality** during the crisis have been less negative, although Greece is among the highest ranking EU countries in terms of that. In 2013 the income quintile share ratio (S80/S20) was 6.6 for Greece, meaning that the wealthiest 20% of the population holds a 6.6 times higher income share than the poorest 20%, against 5.1% for the EU-28 as a whole. At the same time the Gini coefficient for Greece was 34.4% for 2013 (from 34.3% in 2012).

What is most worrying is the fact that the above mentioned indices regarding **children and the young** have worsened more than the respective ones for the general population.

<sup>6</sup> The target population is defined on the basis of 3 indicators: at-risk of poverty rate, or/and material deprivation rate, or/and people living in jobless households rate.

<sup>7</sup> Hellenic NSR 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, Living Conditions Indicators, Press Release 13.10.2014.



The risk of **poverty rate for children** and the young, started to show signs of steep increase between 2011 and 2012, after a period of rather stagnant percentages:

**Table 3: At –risk –of-poverty rate (after social transfers) in Greece<sup>9</sup>**

Age group	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total (%)	20.1	19.7	20.1	21.4	23.1	23.1
0 – 17 (%)	23	23.7	23	23.7	26.9	28.8

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

The course of the at-risk-of poverty rate (Table 3) shows that the **child poverty rate is constantly higher** than the corresponding percentage for the total population. (Specifically in 2013 it was higher by 5.7%).

The **at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion rate** of people aged 0-17 years **rose by 9.4 percentage points between 2008 and 2013**, with most of this change recorded between 2011 and 2012 and also with a **significant increase between 2012 and 2013**.

**Table 4: At –risk –of-poverty or social exclusion rate (0-17)<sup>10</sup>**

	2008	2011	2012	2013
0-17 (%)	28.7	30.4	35.4	38.1

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

The percentage of people **under 17 years** facing **severe material deprivation over doubled between 2008 and 2013**, that is from **10.4% in 2008**, it rose up to **23.3% in 2013** (20.9 in 2012).

The situation is similar for young people that live in households with very low work intensity:

**Table 5: Children living in households with very low work intensity**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
%	4.2	3.9	3.9	3.6	4.8	6.3	9.2	12.9	13.8

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

Looking at the above mentioned figures and data, makes quite clear the fact that **children are hit hard by poverty and social exclusion in Greece** and their situation becomes even harder if they live in households with very low work intensity, or in single parent families: In 2013 the at risk of poverty rate was 37.2% for a single parent family, that is 14.1% higher than while the respective rate for the general population (23.1%).

<sup>9</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, Press Releases: March 2007, March 2010, February 2012, November 2013, October 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority, Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, Press Releases: March 2007, March 2010, February 2012, November 2013, October 2014.



## National Targets in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The Greek State has set up three national targets<sup>11</sup> regarding the poverty reduction:

1. Reduction of the number of people at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion by 450,000 by 2020 which means a reduction of the at-risk of poverty and/or exclusion rate from 28.1% in 2008 to 24% in 2020.
2. Reduction of the number of children (0-17 years) at -risk-of poverty by 100,000 until 2020, which is translated into a reduction of at-risk-of poverty rate for children (0-17) from 23% in 2008 to 18% in 2020.
3. Development of a "social safety net" against social exclusion, which includes access to basic services, such as medical care, housing and education.

The progress in achieving these targets is negative regarding the first two targets, as it is described above. Not only have the specific indicators been deteriorating, but the deterioration is significant for all three components of the first indicator. Regarding the third target, an effort has been made by the launching of the pilot programme of the guaranteed minimum income scheme (see below).

As it is obvious **the tendency is rather to diverge than to converge to the anti-poverty targets**. Apart from the fact that efforts should focus in reversing this situation, a revision of the targets may be required. It should be mentioned that the possibility of the revision of the targets (even in 2015) is under study.

## 2. Anti-Poverty (and Child Poverty) Policies

The main long-term challenge of the social policy in Greece remains a sustainable long-term strategy against poverty and social exclusion, while at short run, the main challenge is to face the social consequences of the economic crisis<sup>12</sup>. A decrease of poverty and social exclusion will not occur in Greece if the unemployment rate does not reduce significantly. However, due to the labour market situation, even though a small decrease of unemployment is observed, it is not sufficient to reverse the situation. Therefore, the unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the households with low working intensity, the young unemployed people (up to 29 years) and the **children** constitute **key target groups** as regarding the effort to combat the risk of severe poverty and social exclusion. On the other hand, enhancing the delivery of community-based services at local or regional level is also of the highest importance.

In order to address these challenges, the National social Inclusion System is under way, given the fact that the "**Framework of National Strategy for Social Inclusion**" is completed after a (rather short) public consultation that was launched by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare.

According to this Framework, the architecture of the National strategy is based on a life cycle approach, which pays particular attention to children and to safeguarding their opportunities from the first years of life, during early childhood, school age and young age.

Therefore **children facing the risk of poverty or social exclusion are one of the main target-groups of the strategy**, which will also be the case as far as the regional social inclusion strategies are concerned.

<sup>11</sup> Hellenic NRP 2011-2014.

<sup>12</sup> Greek NRP 2014.



In the above mentioned "Framework" is also described the **mechanism** for the **effective monitoring and implementation** of the social inclusion and social protection policies, which will be completed in 2015 (according to the respective timetable). This is also an important step, since capacity building in the field of social situation constitutes another challenge for the Greek administration system.

As an horizontal measure the **pilot minimum income scheme** is currently being implemented in thirteen municipalities (one in each region). The programme is addressed to individuals and families living in conditions of extreme poverty, providing beneficiaries with income support, in combination with social reintegration activities and is run in addition to the existing policies for combating poverty and social exclusion. The results of this pilot programme will be used to design the permanent minimum income scheme (to be implemented in 2016).

Apart from measures like the granting of the unemployment allowance to freelancers and the self-employed, the reduction of employers social security contributions by 3.9%, the shortening of the insurance period for qualification to medical and hospital care insurance, the health vouchers that provide access to health services, a broad set of active labour market policies are implemented, mainly through the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED). Additionally, the National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan is expected to contribute to the improvement of the situation of young people.

Furthermore in 2014, 450 million euros were allocated to support citizens and families with very low annual income, allowing for a real estate property of small value. The income threshold for eligibility and the amount allocated per beneficiary depended on their marital status (with single-parent families being more favourably treated) as well as on the existence of disabled family members.

During the last years and within the framework of the limited fiscal (and social) budget, major reforms have been implemented in Greece in the area of social inclusion. These reforms aimed at providing access for all to the resources, rights and services, preventing social exclusion and fighting all forms of discrimination leading to exclusion. Particular attention was given to people entering into the labour market as well as to the support of families and children.

In that context there are being implemented measures to **support parents' participation** in the labour market such as active labour market programmes, provision of childcare services and childcare leave in public and private sector. Emphasis is also given in **the provision of access** to high-quality, affordable early childhood education and care services for children. The data show an improvement in the relevant coverage rates of childcare facilities: 20% (8% in 2010, 19% in 2011) of children under three and 76% (69% in 2010 & 75% in 2011) of children from 3 years to minimum compulsory school age are enrolled in formal childcare in 2012 (EU-28 averages are 28% and 83% respectively).

Regarding **education**, every child living in Greece, regardless the residence status, has the right to be enrolled in Greek schools. Significant measures are promoted including extra lessons to secondary school students, all-day schools promoting a diverse and intercultural learning (including Sports, Second Foreign Language, Arts, Preparation class as an integrated subject etc.) and educational Priority Zones in regions with special characteristics (low educational attendance, high percentage of early school leaving, low percentage of access to higher education and low socio-economical conditions) aiming at an inclusive education system. 'Reception Classes' and 'Supportive Tutoring Classes' for students coming from sensitive social groups are also in force.



Apart from the horizontal policies, specific measures giving the children access to financial resources are being implemented, such as:

- The “**allowance for the unprotected children**”, which is given on a monthly basis to fatherless children (0-16 years of age), who live within their family environment in extreme poverty conditions;
- The “**single benefit for children**”, which is a means tested allowance, established in 2012;
- The “**allowance for families with 3 or more children**”, since 2013.

In addition to those, the General Secretariat for Youth under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has been implementing The “**Legal Help for Young**”, a programme providing legal assistance to minors and socially vulnerable young people and covering their representation before the courts. Moreover, the “**SCHEIDIA**” action supporting families with children below the poverty line, living in underprivileged neighbourhoods of Attica, included school education support, feeding, as well as psychological support for children and parents.

The action “**Harmonisation of Professional and Family Life**”, involves supporting people with disabilities through child care in the “Centres of Creative Occupation for Children with disabilities” or other kindergardens of comprehensive care. Single parents are also being helped by a subsidy programme of 12 months.

The pilot programme “**Nobody stays out**” 2012-2013 which aimed at providing comprehensive counselling and mediation services to young people, up to 40 years old, who faced the risk of homelessness. More specifically, specialised legal assistance, psychological support and job networking was provided to vulnerable groups in order to maintain their houses and their economic independence. The programme focused, during the pilot phase, in the Attica region, as this is the area with the higher population concentration.

As far as the **future plans** are concerned, according to the Framework of the National Strategy that has already been submitted to the European Commission and as mentioned above, **tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children is one of the main objectives of the under development Social Inclusion Strategy.**

On that basis, the designed measures include **early intervention**, even during infancy<sup>13</sup> as well as **integrated programmes** combining income and institutional support to the parents, with (for the children) **access to services** such as preschool education, creative activities, entertainment, playgrounds and camping for all ages, open care services for children and adolescents, quality primary and secondary education for all improvement of the adoption and inter-country adoption procedures (for example by the establishment of a national record), upgrading of the institutional care services, legal assistance to minors and promotion of deinstitutionalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of children with disabilities.

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<sup>13</sup> The infant mortality indicator increased from 2.91% in 2012 to 3.69% in 2013.





### **3. Cooperation of services, stakeholders involvement and consultation**

#### **Cooperation**

Tackling child poverty is government's responsibility and as a multidimensional problem, involves many ministries and public bodies. The Social protection and Social Cohesion Directorate of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare is legally responsible for the elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the upcoming National Strategy for Social Inclusion. This task is currently being carried out by the above mentioned directorate with the cooperation of the Managing authority of the ESF and of the OP of Human Resources Development.

The services involved in the fight against poverty and child poverty are provided by public (ministries, local administration authorities, hospitals, orphanages, nurseries) and private bodies. Cooperation between them is satisfactory, but the lack of coordination and the overlapping of competences limit the effectiveness and efficiency of the whole system. This is expected to be addressed by the National Social Inclusion System.

#### **Stakeholders involvement and consultation**

Greece has a limited tradition in social dialogue and consultation, despite the existence of the relevant institutional framework. The implementation of the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Employment and Social Protection and Inclusion led to an open process of many relevant stakeholders participation (politicians, public sector, local administration authorities, NGOs) in the elaboration of the National strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Unfortunately, it didn't last. The consultation regarding the NRP and NSR elaboration is carried out within the competent departments of the relevant ministries.

The establishment (by law since 2003) of the National Employment Committee and the National Social Protection Committee was supposed to activate the participation of all relevant stakeholders in designing and evaluating social policies. The National Social Protection Committee is composed by representatives of governmental bodies, social partners and NGOs. The role of the Committee is to promote social dialogue on combating poverty and social exclusion and to contribute to the establishment of a Network for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The fact that the Committee does not meet on a regular basis is something that should change.

A step in the direction of enhancing the mentality of participation and consultation was taken when open public consultation was offered by the Prime Minister's Office through an Internet site. Recently an online public consultation was carried out regarding the Framework for the Social inclusion strategy.

### **4. Comparison**

In Greece there is no such structure or standard procedure as the Belgian consultation platforms. However some similarities can be found. The regional "branches" of the National Inclusion strategy will bring together local authorities and local services with the central government regarding the implementation and evaluation of policies against child poverty.

A similar example is the current implementation of the pilot minimum income scheme programme, where the whole procedure is based on the cooperation between the ministry of Labour, the General Secretariat of Information Systems and the municipalities.



In contrast with other member states, Greece has little tradition in public consultation procedures. At the time being there is no structured way to ensure the involvement of stakeholders in the fight against poverty (such as the Belgian platform) and there is no structure focused on Europe 2020 or the social OMC.

The two committees mentioned above, that is the National Employment Committee and the National Social Protection Committee, could become the means for a more structured and in regular basis dialogue with different stakeholders. The National Social Protection Committee, probably in cooperation with the Greek Anti-Poverty Network could become an effective structure to fight poverty.

A conclusion that came out from the last year's Peer Review on the Belgian Platform against Poverty was that there is much for Greece to learn from Belgian good practice on organising and supporting consultation processes in general and in the field of poverty in particular. The establishment of a specific structure such as the Belgian platform could be a first step as it could play a significant role by contributing to the EU reporting and to the coordination of all national structures. It could also be a direct link with the European Platform against poverty.

## 5. Epilogue

The current social situation and in particular the situation of children threatened by poverty and social exclusion in Greece calls for action. Early intervention seems to be a key factor in addressing the problem and breaking the vicious cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. Designing and implementing integrated approaches to early childhood demand (apart from the strong political will) detection of the needs and close cooperation of all relevant stakeholders.

As described in the host country paper, the local consultation platforms in Belgium serve this purpose. They aim at detecting and preventing child poverty, at sensitising local stakeholders, at stimulating local support on individual and collective basis and at initiating cooperation where it does not exist, or if it exists, reinforcing it according to local needs. The whole procedure -of course after it has been evaluated - seems that it could be a useful lesson for Greece, as it seems to match with the architecture and the objectives of the Framework for National Social Inclusion Strategy regarding the fight against child poverty.

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