



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National monitoring frameworks for public social spending

Greece

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
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Unit D.2 — Social Protection

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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

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2022

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Manuscript completed in November 2022

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QUOTING THIS REPORT

Konstantinidou, D., Capella, A., Theodoroulakis, M. and Economou, Ch. (2022). *ESPN Thematic Report on National monitoring frameworks for public social spending – Greece*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission.

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Summary

Greece lacks a dedicated national framework for monitoring public social spending. The absence of such a mechanism could be considered one of the major weaknesses of public social spending reporting in Greece. Social spending reporting in Greece relies mainly on the country's obligations in the context of the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) and the European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS) frameworks. Public social spending is also monitored under the general national budget processes for fiscal reporting. However, it is worth mentioning that, even though the annual state budget introductory report includes a distinct Social Budget, which includes projected expenditure for the whole social sector broken down by entity, there is no independent monitoring and reporting for this component of the state budget. Efforts have been concentrated over the last few years on the introduction of performance budgeting elements to the current budgeting framework through the implementation of the Performance Budgeting Project reform, which could be regarded as a strength of the national processes for monitoring public spending. This reform is expected to bring about *"a total shift in the focus of budgeting, away from management of inputs at aggregated level and towards a focus on the results of spending and achievement of policy objectives"*. However, the actual performance budgeting framework that will be adopted is not known yet, while it is unclear whether or not this reform will be implemented in a timely way, let alone what the reform's outcomes will be.

There are no specific reporting tools used to evaluate the effectiveness of public social expenditure in terms of achieving particular social objectives. Although emphasis has been placed over recent years on *"making social transfers more efficient and better targeted at those in need"* (Ziomas *et al.*, 2019, p. 23), no action has been taken thus far on monitoring the effectiveness of public social expenditure. This is congruent with the fact that, during the prolonged period of financial and economic crisis that the country has been faced with, the main focus has been on curtailing public expenditure as part of the fiscal consolidation measures that were agreed and implemented within the framework of the bail-out agreements.

In this context, a number of spending reviews have been conducted over recent years – initially on a pilot basis, and since 2018 in a more systematic way. In addition, the establishment of the National Mechanism for Co-ordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion Policies is considered a positive step toward monitoring and evaluating relevant policies. However, concerns have been raised with regard to the actual range of functions that this mechanism performs, while it is questionable whether certain elements – such as adequate administrative capacity, and specific procedures, methods and tools for monitoring and evaluation – are properly in place to support the effective operation of this mechanism.

Two ad hoc reviews related to the monitoring of public social expenditure have been carried out in Greece in recent years. The first concerns a comprehensive review of the social welfare system in Greece, and the second is an *ex post* evaluation study of the first two years of the nationwide implementation of the Social Solidarity Income (SSI) scheme, which is a type of guaranteed minimum income scheme focusing on households living in extreme poverty. Another tool is the one used to monitor public pension expenditure in Greece, the Unified System of Control and Payment of Pensions (HELIOS); while public healthcare expenditure is monitored through the OECD's System of Health Accounts (SHA).

1 Country-specific monitoring frameworks for public social spending

1.1 Country-specific dedicated monitoring framework(s)

Despite the fact that comprehensive monitoring of public social spending could improve budgeting effectiveness, Greece lacks a dedicated national framework for monitoring public social spending. Social spending reporting in Greece relies mainly on the country's obligations in the context of the COFOG and ESSPROS frameworks.

Apart from that, public social spending is monitored by the general national budget processes. However, even though the annual state budget introductory report includes a distinct Social Budget, which includes projected expenditure for the whole social sector broken down by entity, there is no independent monitoring and reporting for this component of the state budget. In practice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance) is responsible for monitoring the annual Social Budget, though no information is publicly available with regard to its execution. This means that the public social spending incurred is only quantified and monitored as part of the general budget arrangements for fiscal reporting that exist for public expenditure as a whole. According to the current budgetary framework, the Ministry of Finance collects data on key fiscal indicators and prepares a monthly General Government Bulletin, published on the Ministry of Finance's website, within 30 days after the end of the month. As Moretti, Keller and Chevauchez (2019) highlight, these bulletins "*have become the main source of information for all stakeholders involved in fiscal monitoring, and have played a major role in re-establishing the credibility of fiscal policy*" (p. 61). In addition to these monthly reports, bulletins are also published concerning the quarterly and annual monitoring of compliance with fiscal targets set in the state budget across all general government entities.

It is considered necessary to point out that Greece, prior to the 2008-2009 financial and economic crisis, did not have a clear and comprehensive legal framework for budgetary governance. The budget formulation, implementation and monitoring processes were highly fragmented, non-transparent and ineffective (Hawkesworth *et al.*, 2008; Spanou, 2018; Anastasatou and Tsakoglou, 2019), while the Greek fiscal system was characterised by significant weaknesses that related mainly to "*the poor mechanism of setting up the budget and the lack of any systematic monitoring of its implementation*" (Kaplanoglou, 2019, p. 6). However, over the period of the economic crisis, as part of the bail-out agreement¹ commitments, Greece implemented a number of structural reforms in the public sector that related to public financial management (Miliakou *et al.*, 2017; Spanou, 2019). The aim of these reforms was to enhance the country's budget-setting procedure and the rigorous monitoring of its execution, as well as to ensure transparent fiscal reporting. It becomes evident, therefore, that the legal framework for budgetary governance which is currently in place has been developed and established as a result of the country's obligations under the three bail-out agreements.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that efforts have been concentrated over the last few years on the introduction of performance budgeting elements to the current budgeting framework.² Since 2019, the Performance Budgeting Project reform has been undergoing implementation, which involves a gradual five-year transition to a performance budgeting framework. Within the framework of this project reform, the shift from the current budgeting framework towards the establishment of the performance budgeting framework

¹ During the period 2010-2017, Greece signed three bail-out agreements (Memoranda of Understanding – MoU) and a Supplementary MoU (SMoU): the first MoU on 3 May 2010; the second on 9 March 2012; the third on 19 August 2015; and the SMoU on 5 July 2017.

² This was first attempted during the period 2007-2010 but was halted with the outbreak of the 2008-2009 financial and economic crisis.

is expected to take place in two stages as specified in the Performance Budgeting Pilot Planning Manual (Ministry of Finance, 2019). These are as follows.

- a) The presentation of the 2022 state budget in terms of performance budgeting for all general government entities. This will take the form of programmes (presentational approach). The programme classification that is expected to be used was developed in co-operation with line Ministries and other central administration entities. These programmes will be accompanied by an estimate of spending as well as key performance indicators that will be utilised for the assessment of performance.
- b) The budget formulation (in 2023) and budget execution of a Performance Budget for the year 2024.

Ultimately, this reform is expected to bring about “a total shift in the focus of budgeting, away from management of inputs at aggregated level and towards a focus on the results of spending and achievement of policy objectives” (Moretti, Keller and Chevauchez, 2019, p. 48). However, the actual performance budgeting framework that will be adopted is not known yet, as it will be the result of the various pilot exercises; while it remains to be seen if this reform will be implemented in a timely manner and whether it will be successful in strengthening the link between financing and outcomes, thereby improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public social spending.

1.2 Separate monitoring framework(s) linked to schemes provided by employers

There are no separate monitoring frameworks in Greece associated with schemes provided by employers. At present, there are 27³ occupational insurance funds that operate as legally autonomous non-profit entities and provide in-kind and cash benefits to their beneficiaries. These entities are governed by private law and have financial and accounting independence; and, as such, each entity is responsible for monitoring and reporting its expenditure.

1.3 Distinction between current expenditure and capital expenditure

As already mentioned, there is a total absence of any national framework for monitoring public social spending in Greece. Spending is currently being monitored through the general national budget processes, which do not distinguish between current expenditure and capital expenditure.

1.4 Type of monitoring: level and outcomes

The general national budget processes solely monitor the level of spending, with no element of social outcome monitoring. It is worth mentioning that there are no planned reforms to introduce social outcome monitoring mechanisms (see also Section 2).

1.5 Level of granularity of public social spending

As to the level of granularity in the monthly budget execution reports published by the General Accounting Office, public spending is broken down by broad categories (i.e. social benefits, transfers, purchases of goods and services, and subsidies), presented according to the European System of Accounts 2010 and Government Finance Statistics Manual 2014 codifications (Moretti, Keller and Chevauchez, 2019). Spending is reported in absolute numbers, while comparisons are made with the approved budget and the previous year's

³ See <https://eletea.com.gr/statistika/> (in Greek).

budget outcomes (in absolute numbers). It should be noted, however, that this concerns public expenditure overall, not just public social spending.

1.6 Breakdown of public social spending

There are no tools or other relevant frameworks available in Greece that provide an overview of public social spending broken down by specific population groups. The only exception in this regard could be HELIOS, which is a monitoring tool providing an overview of pension expenditure (see Section 2).

1.7 Timing and public accessibility of data

In the absence of a national dedicated framework in Greece, public social spending is currently monitored through the general national budget processes. In this context, a budget execution report, the General Government Monthly Bulletin, is published every month by the General Accounting Office, with detailed financial data on the actual execution of public expenditure. In addition, the state budget's expenditure targets are reviewed every three months. A report is published every quarter with information about the general government entities that deviate by more than 10% from the quarterly expenditure targets set in the state budget. The assessment of the state budget expenditure targets is also made on an annual basis, and a report is published concerning the entities that deviate by more than 10% from their target. All these reports are publicly available, and accessible through the official website of the Ministry of Finance.

1.8 Sub-national frameworks

Currently, there are no sub-national monitoring frameworks in place for monitoring public social spending in Greece.

2 Reporting/review tools for public social spending

As already underlined in this report, Greece lacks a dedicated national framework for monitoring public social spending, let alone its effectiveness. Further to this, there are no specific reporting tools used to evaluate the effectiveness of public social expenditure in terms of achieving particular social objectives. Although emphasis has been placed over recent years on "*making social transfers more efficient and better targeted at those in need*" (Ziomas *et al.*, 2019, p. 23), no action has been taken thus far as regards the monitoring of the effectiveness of public social expenditure. This is congruent with the fact that, during the prolonged period of the financial and economic crisis that the country has been faced with, the main focus has been on curtailing public expenditure as part of the fiscal consolidation measures that were agreed and implemented within the framework of the bail-out agreements.

It should be noted, however, that, since 2010, various public management reforms have been implemented in Greece, primarily aimed at ensuring accurate monitoring and timely fiscal reporting in order to meet the budgetary targets specified in the bail-out agreements (Spanou, 2018). In this context, a number of spending reviews have been conducted – initially on a pilot basis, and since 2018 in a more systematic way. To facilitate this, a directorate dedicated to conducting spending reviews has been established in the Ministry of Finance (OECD, 2020), while a strategy for performing spending reviews is currently under development in co-operation with the European Commission and the OECD (Hellenic Republic – Ministry of Finance, 2021). As stated in the 2020 Country Report for Greece (European Commission, 2020), "*the government plans to use spending reviews more regularly, [though] the process has so far only addressed inputs and costs while outputs and outcomes have not been challenged*" (p. 27-28).

Moreover, acknowledgment should be made of the fact that, in 2016, the National Mechanism for Co-ordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Inclusion and Social

Cohesion Policies was established. According to the relevant provisions of Law 4445/2016 (Article 1), this mechanism is aimed at the planning, updating, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of the relevant multi-sectoral policies for social inclusion and social cohesion. Although the monitoring of public social spending is not specifically mentioned in its mandate, the establishment of this mechanism is considered a positive step toward monitoring and evaluating relevant policies. After significant delays, the mechanism is considered to have been in full operation since February 2018, though concerns have been raised with regard to the actual range of functions that this mechanism performs. It is also questionable whether certain elements – such as adequate administrative capacity, and specific procedures, methods and tools for monitoring and evaluation – are properly in place to support the effective operation of this mechanism. This can be further supported by the fact that, very recently (May 2021), the competent Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs commissioned a study with the aim of describing the current operating situation of the mechanism, and to map the interventions needed to ensure compliance with the legal provisions of its establishment.⁴ It should also be noted that the mechanism's financing is supported by EU funds, while the expansion of its functions is included in the Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan.⁵

Additionally, it worth noting that two ad hoc reviews relating to the monitoring of public social expenditure have been carried out in Greece in recent years. The first was conducted within the framework of the third MoJ and concerned a comprehensive review of the social welfare system in Greece (World Bank, 2016). The aim was not to assess the effectiveness of public social spending or of the social welfare system in terms of achieving social objectives, but rather to create fiscal space for the national implementation of the SSI scheme⁶ as well as to improve targeting. According to the findings of this review, Greece's social welfare system was very complicated, fragmented and underpinned by poor targeting. The study included specific recommendations for strengthening the social welfare system by consolidating and rationalising various social welfare programmes and benefits in order to create fiscal space for more targeted programmes. Following these conclusions, the country initiated a structural reform of the social welfare system that focused mainly on the abolition of small and less effective benefits and the consolidation of the then family/child benefits into a single Child Benefit (Ziomas *et al.*, 2018; 2018a), with the overall objective of creating fiscal space for the national implementation of the SSI scheme (World Bank, 2016).

The second ad hoc review concerned an *ex post* evaluation of the first two years of the nationwide implementation of the SSI scheme. The objective of the evaluation exercise was to examine the effectiveness of the scheme's targeting methodology as well as its impact based on selected poverty indicators, and to identify potential amendments to the programme's design and implementation procedures. The review was based on a nationally representative survey and the findings were published in a report entitled: *A Quantitative Evaluation of the Greek Social Solidarity Income* (Marini *et al.*, 2019). The study concluded that, although the SSI scheme constitutes a significant source of income for (extremely) poor households, it does not have much of an impact on poverty incidence, while the implementation of the second and third pillars of the programme⁷ remains very limited, thus impeding its long-term impact on beneficiaries' well-being. As to the effective use of resources, the study concluded that the programme's resources are being used effectively to assist poor households. However, no reference is made to the relevant methodology

⁴ See: <https://ypergasias.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Διακήρυξη-Συνοπτικού-Διαγωνισμού-MIS-5010158-YE-4-ΑΔΑΜ.pdf> (in Greek).

⁵ The presentation of Greece's recovery and resilience plan is available at: https://primeminister.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Greece-2_0-April-2021.pdf.

⁶ The SSI scheme is a type of minimum income scheme that was later renamed as the Guaranteed Minimum Income.

⁷ The SSI scheme is based on three pillars, namely: (a) financial assistance; (b) access to social services and goods; and (c) the provision of supportive services for their (re)integration into the labour market (Ziomas *et al.*, 2017).

used to assess the effectiveness of the resources; nor is the definition of resources provided. Further to this, no changes have been introduced – thus far – to the scheme’s implementation as a result of the review’s conclusions.

Another monitoring tool used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is HELIOS, providing an overview of pension expenditure.⁸ In particular, since 2013, the HELIOS system has published monthly reports that entail detailed statistical data on the number of pensioners and pension payments (including pension category, new entitlements, and geographic dispersion). However, these reports are only intended to ensure the financial viability of the pension system and are not a tool for assessing the effectiveness of public pension expenditure.

Finally, it should also be noted that public healthcare expenditure in Greece is monitored through the OECD’s SHA, which is performed on annual basis by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT). The SHA relies on three main axes that depict: (a) the economic burden of each financing agency; (b) the direction of health expenditure by healthcare provider; and (c) the direction of expenditure by healthcare function. The SHA compilers receive information from the national accounts prepared by ELSTAT, concerning expenditure data on: gross fixed capital formation in the health sector; data on household health expenditure (Household Budget Survey); expenditure by non-profit institutions that are active in the health sector; data on non-governmental organisations; current revenue and expenditure of the sub-sectors of general government (mainly central government, the social security funds, and public hospitals); and data on payments by the social security funds to public hospitals. Despite the efforts made over recent years to rationalise the public healthcare system, however, it is still characterised by an inefficient allocation of resources, which is aggravated by the lack of mechanisms for identifying priorities and assessing their effectiveness (Economou *et al.*, 2017).

⁸ For more information see: <https://www.idika.gr/esepts-mhniaies-ek8eseis> (in Greek).

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