

POVERTY WATCH

2021



Greek Antipoverty Network

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1. Preface

In Greece the elderly people are a category of citizens forgotten by the state, however many we are. We are talking about a generation of people who have grown up during WWII and whose dignity might be hurt if offered meals or other items distributed by anyone other than the state.

We have learnt to depend on the people we vote for.

I am 88 years old and fortunately own a small flat, where I brought up my kids, but now live alone on a 400-euro pension per month. I see the prices going up and phenomena like the pandemic as an attack on our dignity since there seem to be no limits in what governments won't do in order to keep us poor.

Katerina B., 88-year-old woman living in a run down area of Athens.

The Hellenic Antipoverty Network (EAPN-Greece) is an independent body with more than 30 member organisations that offer support to socially excluded groups. EAPN-Greece is a partner of the European Antipoverty Network (EAPN). Its goals are to reduce poverty and inequality; give voice and increase the participation of people affected by poverty in the decision making processes. The National Networks draw up country-by-country reports yearly to highlight aspects of poverty in their region and exert pressure on the European Commission and all European Union institutions to adopt more inclusive integration strategies, policies and measures.

This report is the third one compiled by EAPN-Greece: The first in 2019 recorded the then latest statistics and trends related to poverty as well as measures needed to reduce it. The 2020 report included quantitative and qualitative data as well as the experience of member and non-member organisations active in the field. Poverty Watch 2021 focuses on the realities of the pandemic and the ensuing crisis.

2021 is the year that the world is trying to return to normality and learn to live with COVID-19 since the repercussions of the pandemic to our health and the implementation of policies around the world seem they are here to stay causing a domino of effects in multiple if not all aspects of life especially affecting the risk of poverty in always larger parts of the population. In Greece, in particular, the crisis holds well while basic rights are being limited keeping in line with the general trend.

The World Bank's Updated estimates of the impact of covid-19 on global poverty seen here <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-turning-corner-pandemic-2021> maintains that although there has been a review of the expected poverty rates in comparison with the 2020 predictions *the uncertainty surrounding the 2021 estimates is enormous and our method to nowcast global poverty carries a lot of uncertainty, in particular with regards to its omission of impacts on inequality.* Figures show fewer than an additional 150 million people forced into extreme poverty as predicted last year, however, *in the*

poorest countries of the world, the impact of COVID-19 on poverty is not only still present, but it is worsening.

Within the global context, the situation in Greece remains fluid with the recent formal statistics claiming that 28.9% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion related to the incomes declared in 2020, affecting mostly 18-64 year olds (31.9%) as shown here <https://www.cnn.gr/oikonomia/story/271107/se-kindyno-ftoxeias-i-koinonikoy-apokleismoy-to-28-9-toy-plithysmoy>.

The formal statistics published are always based on the previous year's collected and processed data, therefore while drafting the Poverty Watch 2021 there is substantial lack of fully updated quantitative information. This is supplemented with qualitative data on the visible and invisible aspects of poverty monitored through a survey within EAPN-Greece member-organisations that support people from the general population, poor households or socially excluded groups and who share their experience with us. This survey will be concluded by the end of 2021; added to Poverty Watch 2021; and made available widely.

According to the “**2019 (pre) covid-19 situation survey**” the greatest problems faced by the beneficiaries of organisations that are providers of services and support have been: long term unemployment; access to (public) services and programmes; low income; lack of housing (accommodation in practically dilapidated houses, old establishments and in crowded conditions); health issues; burdened psychology. Shortage of staff and resources for carrying out these exact services and a weakness to cover the needs in medicines and other health products having been subsequent with the advent of the virus have also caused concern. Any prediction as to the results of this year's survey is uncalled for. However, a general output that can be included is the prevalent rise in the figures concerning domestic violence and an increase in the number of femicides made known to the general public that extends well into 2021.

2. Definitions and fundamental trends related to poverty during the pandemic

When we refer to poverty in Greece, we mean notably the relative poverty i.e., the comparison of the living standard of the people who are in a disadvantaged position to the rest of the population.

Relative poverty is defined in two ways:

A) With reference to the **poverty risk**, where only income criteria are taken into account (AROPE index). The risk of poverty is defined as the percentage of people living in households of which the total disposable income is less than 60% of the national median equivalent income. The median income is the income of the middle person, i.e., the citizen who is in the middle of the income distribution. The people who are richer than those are exactly the same in number as the people who are poorer. We will refer to the "Poverty Risk" based on income in the next section in detail.

B) With reference to the "Poverty or Social Exclusion Risk", where three (3) indicators are included. In addition to income poverty (AROPE index), access to nine (9) basic goods (Severe Material Deprivation - SMD index) and the labor intensity of the household are taken into account. In this case, Eurostat and the Hellenic Statistical Service - ELSTAT use the gross index AROPE (Persons Living at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion) which records higher risk of poverty. The AROPE index is also used to evaluate the **Europe 2020** programme, which had in 2013 set the goal "to reduce people who are already or are at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 20 million by 2020".

The **Severe Material Deprivation index (SMD)** measures the financial inability to access basic material goods, i.e., the ability to: 1) pay for rent, bills and installments of loans or purchases; 2) for holidays of at least one week per year; 3) meat, chicken, fish or vegetables of equal nutritional value every other day; 4) manage emergencies amounting to about 380 euros; 5) own landline or mobile phone; 6) own color TV; 7) own laundry machine; 8) own passenger car; and 9) have access to heating. The lack of 4 of these 9 goods indicates that the person lives in conditions of material deprivation.

Material deprivation of goods for 2020 was estimated at 16.5% increased by 0.3 percentage points compared to 2019 and to the previous years of implementation of the Memoranda. From 2013 until 2019, the deprivation was more intense and concerned the 19.5% of the total population. The percentage regarding the total population was 20.3 in 2013; 21.5 in 2014; 22.2 in 2015; 22.4 in 2016; 21.1 in 2017; 16.7 in 2018; and 16.2 in 2019. It is important to note that material deprivation is not only faced by the poor but also by an increasing number of the non-poor.

Underemployment is also taken into account for the final configuration of the AROPE index, i.e., living in low-labor-intensive households. Consequently, the working time of economically active members of the household is taken into account as well, i.e., how many household members work and for how long. 17.7% of the total population is at-risk-of-poverty (after social transfers), 16.5% of the total population is under material deprivation and 12.8% of the population 0-59 years old, live in households with very low work intensity.

For unemployed persons, the at-risk-of-poverty rate is significantly higher and amounts to 45.2% showing a significant difference between males and females (51.7% and 39.4% respectively).

From 2005 to 2010, relative poverty in Greece showed decreasing trends, with people living at risk of poverty or social exclusion amounting to 27.7% of the total population in 2010. This percentage started to increase dramatically after 2011, reflecting the conditions of the evolving economic crisis, reaching 36% in 2014. According to the latest available data (Survey of Income and Living Conditions of Households of ELSTAT), a slight decrease followed: 35.7% in 2015, 35.6% in 2016, 34, 8% in 2017, 31.8% in 2018, 30.0% in 2019 and 28.9% in 2020.

According to the recent data by the ELSTAT, the Hellenic Statistical Authority, seen here <https://www.cnn.gr/oikonomia/story/271107/se-kindyno-ftoxeias-i-koinonikoy-apokleismoy-to-28-9-toy-plithysmoy>

- 17.7% of the population is at risk of poverty; 17.6% experience material deprivation of basic goods; and 12.8% of the population aged 0-59 years old live in households with very low work intensity.
- The proportional composition of the three indicators gives the percentage of 28.9% of the total population and the estimated number of 3.043.869 inhabitants of the country facing risk of poverty or exclusion.
- The risk of poverty or exclusion of people aged 18-64 years is higher for foreigners (54.0%) than Greeks (30.2%). 51,2% of these foreigners were born in another country while 30.0% were born and live in Greece.
- The at-risk-of-poverty rate for children aged 0-17 years (child poverty) amounted to 21.4%, recording an increase of 0.3 percentage points compared to 2019, while for the population 18-64 years old and 65 years old and over this is 18.5% and 13.2%, respectively.
- The percentage of households that do not have adequate heating is 16.7% (12% general population and 38.8% poor households).
- 44.6% of the total households state that they are significantly burdened by the repayment of debts from hire purchases or loan payments other than loans connected with the house.
- 71% of the poor households report having great difficulty in making ends meet (coping with usual needs) on their total monthly income.
- 49% of the poor households report that they are confronted with payment arrears regarding the utility bills for electricity, water, natural gas, etc.
- 96.6% of the poor households and 49.5% of the non-poor households report difficulties in meeting unexpected financial expenses of approximately 395 euros on a monthly basis.
- 45.5% of poor households are deprived of proper nutrition (chicken, meat, fish or vegetables of equal nutritional value every other day).
- 3% of the total households do not have a personal computer, although they need one, due to lack of financial resources.
- 4% of the population cannot afford internet connection for personal use at home. The corresponding shares are 12.4% for the poor population and 2.3% for the non-poor population (that had specific consequences on following the school curriculum online during the pandemic).
- 37% of the population cannot spend a small amount of money each week on themselves without having to consult anyone. The corresponding shares for the poor population and the non-poor population are 65.1% and 31.2%/.
- Material deprivation for children aged up to 17 years of age, in 2020, amounts to 19.7%, while the respective percentage for 2009 was 11.9% .

More specifically on **health**:

- 37.3% of the population aged 16 and over stated that there was a case, during the last 12 months, they really needed a medical examination or treatment for their particular health problem and did not undergo it due to COVID-19. The percentages of poor and non-poor populations are 10.1% and 49.6%, respectively.
- 6.8% of the population aged 16 and over has bad or very bad health; 14.7% moderate, while 78.5% have very good or good health.
- 9.8% of the population aged 16 and over for a period of six months or more had limited, due to their own health problems, some activities common to the general population or had too much difficulty with them, while 13.6% had limited, but not too much.
- 25.4% of the population aged 16 and over, stated that there was a case, during the last 12 months, they really needed a **medical** examination or treatment for their own health problem and did not undergo it. The percentages of poor and non-poor population are 50.8% and 20.7%, respectively.
- 30.4% of the population aged 16 and over, stated that there was a case, during the last 12 months, they really needed a **dental** examination or treatment for their own health problem and did not undergo it. The percentages of poor and non-poor population are 55.3 and 26.3%, respectively. 22.4% of the respective population did not undergo it due to COVID-19.
- Vaccination in Greece started on December 28, 2020 and goes well into 2021. Relevant data can be found here: https://www.data.gov.gr/datasets/mdg_emvolio/

3. Consequences of the pandemic and governmental policy for people experiencing poverty

2020 saw Covid-19 treated “successfully” in Greece. This narrative has spread widely and multiplied accordingly by the government only to be retracted during the second phase during 2021 when Greece has, and still is, witnessing dire increases to the numbers of deaths, hospitalised individuals as well as the overall cases of Covid 19 as can be seen here <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/greece/>

The impact of the pandemic during 2020 has been manifold.

Greece's tourism industry has been negatively impacted by the crisis, and a 9.7% economic contraction has been predicted for the fiscal year 2020 directly or indirectly having an impact on the large number of the population who finds employment in this sector throughout the country. Also, the demand for home purchases from residents of other European countries has increased as many properties have become available as a result of Greece's economic difficulties. The closure of businesses and educational institutions has kept people indoors while driving the workforce to unemployment or lack of potential future employment. Human rights as seen in the Human Rights Watch Report for 2021 (with 2020 as reference year) here <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/greece> have suffered an impact on

vulnerable groups of migrant and asylum seekers; unaccompanied minors; women; disabled people and on specific sectors of life particularly attacks on civil society and law enforcement abuse. Health access and availability of medical care and support were as everywhere around the world the two main concerns.

This is an overview of the response measures taken by the government:

Updates on the virus spread, advice on how to behave and react as well as governmental measures put in place officially started on 16 March, 2020 by the Hellenic Ministry of Health on a daily basis until 27 May when the televised briefings by both scientists and representatives of the government stopped only to be reintroduced later and at a different scale as seen here <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/koronoios-telos-kathimerini-enimerosi-tsiodra-hardalia>

During March, school trips came to an end; sports games were to be played with no fans and all educational institutions started an array of closure-reopening that lasts until today. Also during March local quarantines started before the general one. Coronavirus restrictions involving migrant camps were set at the same time with medical teams being sent to the camps to set up virus isolation areas and ensure temperature checking while a ban on public gatherings of 10 or more people and the imposition of a €1,000 fine on violators was announced. Shipping of goods and traveling within Greece and abroad were regulated or banned altogether with heavy curfews and transportation to and from work only being designated as legal times for circulation. Random yet strict checks of personal ids, relevant documents or proof of sms required to have been sent were also set in place together with restrictions in transport services. A second national lockdown was imposed from 7 November to 14 December along with a traffic ban during the night. Restrictions especially on travellers were gradually lifted or were subject to certain rules and criteria met.

During the first month of the official outbreak of the virus a package of measures to support the economy, businesses and employees was announced. The measures included the 4-month suspension of tax and social security obligations of businesses ordered to close with the condition to not dismiss workers. The measure affected about 220,000 businesses and 600,000 employees. The measure included an €800 stipend on workers forced into suspension as well as freelancers in sectors affected by the pandemic. The reduction of VAT tax from 24% to 6% on pharmaceutical products deemed necessary for handling the pandemic namely gloves, masks and antiseptic liquids was also announced along with the inclusion of Greece in an emergency assets purchases' programme of €750 billion launched by the [European Central Bank](#) . The [State Budget](#) was revised to allocate more than €10 billion in support of the economy. The suspension of tax and social security obligations of corporations and the number of beneficiaries of the €800 stipend was extended to include all businesses harmed by the pandemic, all freelancers and self-employed workers and the majority of private sector workers. The state would also cover the cost of

beneficiaries' insurance, pension, and health payments. Special provisions were made for health workers.

According to the [International Monetary Fund](#), as of June 2020 the package of measures in support of the economy, financed from national and EU resources, totals about 14% of Greece's GDP (€24 billion) including loan guarantees as seen in the link below <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

There followed suspensions of entertainment venues, restauration, sports and gym locales in multiple areas of the country as well as a closure of hotels and other tourist accommodations excluding supermarkets, pharmacies and food outlets that offer take-away and delivery only. Reopening has been subject to restrictions ever since.

On 27 February migrants and refugees were deemed a threat to public health in Greece and “illegal” entry from Turkey was announced “no longer being tolerated”. The personnel of the existing camps, doctors, NGOs and refugees considered that measures against the spread of the coronavirus are problematic since people are obliged to live in overcrowded spaces with little to no access to proper health services. On 24 March, 21 international human rights organizations active in Greece including [Amnesty International](#), the [Human Rights Watch](#) and [ActionAid](#) published an open call to the Greek government to take immediate measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Reception and Identification Centres. Cases of covid-19 have been announced among people who reside in camps such as in Ritsona as seen here <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/1039924/koronoios-krousma-sti-ritsona-se-karadina-i-domi/>. The ending of accommodation schemes coincided with the time and refugee families were found homeless http://laikisyspeirosi-fx.blogspot.com/2021/02/blog-post_9.html?m=1

Most noticeable governmental and municipal support measures during the pandemic 2020

- A 534-euro benefit was established for all those employees whose employment was suspended during the pandemic in all business sectors.
- The return of the prepaid tax for 2020 who have suspended their business.
- The opening of the Municipal Homeless Center in Athens.

Principal difficulties for special groups who suffered the most

Covid-19 has been particularly heavy on people who belong in vulnerable groups namely the elderly, the mentally ill, those incarcerated, the Roma community, the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, the lgbtqi community, women and the unemployed. The Hellenic Statistical Authority has not published data on vulnerable groups but mainly uses categorisations according to age groups.

However, some particular data we can provide is:

Children

It is important to note that material deprivation is faced by children aged up to 17 years. In 2020 compared to 2019, the increase in severe material deprivation is higher for children (2.1%) in comparison with the other age groups. Material deprivation for children aged up to 17 years, in 2020, amounts to 19.7%, while the respective percentage for 2009 was 11.9%.

Mental health issues, which have ensued for large numbers of people, have been particularly diagnosed in children who have been subject to social distancing restrictions which have kept them indoors (closure of educational activities, sports venues, parks and playgrounds)

<https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/o-covid-19-kai-oi-psychologikes-eiptoseis-sta-paidia.9220325.html>

- **Violence against children**

Such violence has risen by 10% during 2020 in comparison to 2019, while juvenile delinquency has seen a rise of 30% for the same period

<https://www.tanea.gr/2021/04/19/greece/stoixeia-sok-gia-karantina-ayksithike-kata-10-i-via-pros-ta-paidia-kai-kata-30-i-efiviki-paravatikitita/>

Women

Women suffered great employment losses during the pandemic particularly in the Mediterranean area where inequalities have either way been prevalent.

<https://www.capital.gr/diethni/3554143/naser-kamel-epta-ekatommuria-gunaiques-anerges-sti-mesogeio-exaitias-tis-pandimias>

- **Domestic Violence**

As was the case at a global and European scale, there has been a consistent outbreak of domestic violence traced also to the repercussions of the pandemic.

According to the first Greek Police Report on the matter of domestic violence there has been an increase of 4% in domestic violence cases for 2020 while 82% of the perpetrators were men.

<https://socialpolicy.gr/2021/07/%CE%B7-%CF%80%CF%81%CF%8E%CF%84%CE%B7-%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CE%AD%CE%BA%CE%B8%CE%B5%CF%83%CE%B7-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82-%CE%B1%CF%83.html>

Vaccination and hotspots

June 3, 2021 was the first day for vaccination in a number of hotspots in the Aegean Sea area (<https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/epiheirisi-eleytheria-emboliasmoi-kyt-kara-tepe>). To be able to comprehend the scale of the situation we need to point out that in the Kara Tepe camp (https://www.avgi.gr/gallery/podcasts/379655_i-kybernisi-me-proshima-tin-pandimia-ehei-balei-ti-zoi-7000-anthropon-sto), for example, live 7000 people while the internationally infamous controversial hotspot of Moria, on the island of Lesbos, in the same area, has burnt down on September 8, 2020 <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/stoiheia-apo-ti-dikografia-etsi-kaike-moria>

Social distancing and lockdown

Physical distancing more than social distancing has been the case during the pandemic in Greece in 2020, particularly during phase 1, transforming the otherwise vibrant Greek social life and stretching the inequality span to new dimensions placing the most vulnerable people in unprecedented and more dire social, economic and mental conditions than ever before <https://thepressproject.gr/ftocheia-apeili-koinonikou-apokleismou-kai-terasties-anisotites-metaxy-tou-plithysmou-me-ti-sfragida-tis-elstat/>

Economical consequences

Only 75% of the businesses that suspended their operation during the lockdowns have managed to reopen <https://left.gr/news/gsevee-81-ton-epiheiriseon-apeileitai-me-ptotheysi> while 81% of all businesses is under threat of closure and the protection of the main residence is uncertain for reasons that relate to the new bankruptcy law introduced during 2020 and the pandemic <https://left.gr/news/gsevee-81-ton-epiheiriseon-apeileitai-me-ptotheysi>

4. Recommendations

EAPN Greece, as other institutions working with and for vulnerable groups and people experiencing poverty in the country, have identified the ensuing repercussions of the pandemic of Covid 19 as both severe and long lasting. Therefore, it is only through cooperation and bold decision making and implementation that normality will be re-established; a normality that needs to include improved living conditions for those most vulnerable, citizens facing the risk of poverty and social exclusion to be prepared for similar events and phenomena.

For that to happen the following are needed:

Short term:

1. Particular measures for all the vulnerable groups mentioned above (the elderly, the mentally ill, those incarcerated, the Roma community, the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, the LGBTQI community, women and the unemployed).
2. Simplification of procedures for access to all social transfers and online social services.

3. Free and easy access to Public Health Services.
4. Improvement, extension and expansion of Public Social Services.

Long term:

1. Strengthening of public health units with a particular focus on the countryside.
2. Fostering the cooperation of all stakeholders -government, social partners, institutions, the civil society, academia- on the basis of streamlining measures that concern emergency situations with a focus on the most vulnerable.
3. Human Rights should be on the core of any measures undertaken and solidarity fostered and exercised.
