

GREECE

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **nursery** (*vrefikos stathmos*, 0–2), **childcare centre** (*paidikos stathmos*), 2½–3) and **pre-primary school**¹ (*nipiagogeio*, 4–5)². Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Greece

1831	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The first infant school (<i>nipiako scholio</i>) for 2 to 6 year-olds is founded on the island of Syros by the German missionary Hildner. – In Athens a similar infant school is opened for 2 to 8 year-old girls by the American missionaries John and Francis Hill, considered to be the first initiative of systematic and organised early childhood education.
1836	Establishment of another private school by the organisation <i>Filekpedeftiki Eteria</i> in Athens which includes a pre-primary unit for 3 to 6 year-olds.
1837	Hildner establishes the first training school for early childhood education teachers on the island of Syros.
1853	Further training institutions are established: one by Hill in Athens and also one by the organisation <i>Filekpedeftiki Eteria</i> .
1864	Ekaterini Laskaridou establishes the first kindergarten based on Froebelian principles in Athens.
1895	Statutory definition of kindergarten education for 3 to 5 year-olds
1897	The first kindergarten teacher training school established in Athens by E. Laskaridou.
1926	Opening of first public day nursery
1929	Kindergartens come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.
1962	First official curriculum for kindergartens issued
1966	Founding of one-year kindergarten training departments in the pedagogical academies which close again after four years
1971-1974	Besides the Athens kindergarten teacher school, three new ones are founded in Thessaloniki, Karditsa and Chania, each with a two-year programme.
1980	New official curriculum for kindergartens introduced, putting the child in the centre of the educational process.
1982	Abolition of kindergarten teacher training schools and establishment of Early Childhood Education Departments at the universities
1985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Kindergartens and childcare centres are seen as two separate institutions. – Establishment of experimental kindergartens at the universities – Kindergarten attendance increases gradually and in some areas is made mandatory. – Introductory, annual and periodical CPD of kindergarten teachers are held at the Pedagogical Institute, the Regional Training Centres and in the experimental kindergartens.

¹ In previous SEEPRO studies, these pre-primary educational institutions in Greece were called "kindergartens" – and still are in every day usage. However, as they are now part of the compulsory school system, we will refer to them in this key data synopsis as "pre-primary schools" or "pre-primary groups" or "pre-primary settings".

² **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Greece, where primary school starts at age 6, the corresponding formats are **0–2½/3** and **4–5** years.



1989	Revised curriculum for kindergartens issued.
1997	Official mandate of all-day kindergartens issued.
1998	Organisation and tasks of regular kindergartens issued.
2001	Responsibilities for childcare centres are transferred from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of the Interior; they are now funded and monitored by the municipalities.
2002/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Official curriculum for kindergartens is revised again. – Standard operating regulations are issued for municipal and private non-profit childcare centres.
2006	Kindergarten attendance in the year before starting primary school is made obligatory.
2017	Ministerial Decision 79 specifies regulations for the organisation, objectives and evaluation of pre-primary education and schools.
2018-2021	Gradual lowering of age for compulsory pre-primary enrolment to 4 years of age
2021	A new detailed curriculum is piloted.
2023	New pre-primary curriculum comes into force in September.

Sources: Doliopoulou 2000, 2018; Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Petrogiannis 2013; Birbili and Christodoulou 2018; Megalonidou 2020

ECEC system type and auspices³

Early childhood education and care in Greece is organised as a multi-sectoral system, involving three different ministries. The Ministry of the Interior (*Ypourgeío Esoterikón kai Dioikitikís Anasynkrótisis*) is responsible for municipal **nurseries** for under 3 year-olds (*vrefikoi stathmoi*) and **age-extended nurseries** for children aged 2 months to 4 years (*vrefonipiakoi stathmoi*), as well as municipal **childcare centres** for children aged 2½ to 4 years (*paidikoi stathmoi*). The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ypourgeío Apaschólisis*) is responsible for licensing and supervising private-commercial and non-profit childcare settings. The municipalities are responsible for the establishment and operation of public and private childcare facilities.

Both public and private **pre-primary schools** (*nipiagogeia*) for 4 and 5 year-olds are part of the primary education sector under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (*Ypourgeío Paideías kai Thriskevmáton*).

General objectives and legislative framework

Childcare sector

The objectives of childcare settings for children up to 4 years of age are primarily related to holistic development, mitigating cultural, economic and educational inequalities, supporting a smooth transition from the family to the institution, and paying attention to health and safety aspects. Municipal nurseries and childcare centres for children up to 4 years of age are bound by the standard regulations of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health (Ministerial Decision 41087/29.11.2017 with amendments of 2020), which define the minimum requirements of the facilities.

³ The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Greece³ provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Education sector

The overarching goal of early childhood education primarily concerns the balanced development of children's intellectual, psychological and physical potential, regardless of origin or gender. Important basic principles are freedom of religion, respect for different cultures, peaceful coexistence with others and protection of the environment.

Starting in 2018, attending a pre-primary education setting became mandatory for children from the age of 4, mainly to counteract inequalities of opportunity. Important goals are to build and maintain relationships with others and to prepare children for primary school. The Framework Law and the Presidential Decree (Law 1566/1985) lay down the operating modalities of the pre-primary education settings and the organisation of professional training.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Up to the age of 4, attending a childcare centre is voluntary and children have no legal entitlement to a place.

Law 4521/2018 stipulates that attending a pre-primary school for two years before primary school is to become mandatory on a staggered basis, starting from the 2018-2019 school year. This regulation was implemented nationwide in 2021/22. 25 hours of educational activities per week are obligatory. Four optional hours are offered in the afternoons to enable full-day attendance if desired.

Children start regular primary education at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Nurseries (*vrefikoi stathmoi*) are ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds and age-extended nurseries (*vrefonipiakoi stathmoi*) admit children aged 2 months to 4 years. In some private nurseries, babies are accepted as early as 40 days.

Childcare centres (*paidikoi stathmoi*) admit children between 2½ years of age and entry into the compulsory pre-primary programme. **Special needs settings** also exist to cater for children in these age groups.

Enrolment priority is given to children of working parents, children from unemployed families, families from disadvantaged backgrounds, children of single parents, separated parents and children with special needs.

Childcare settings are open from 1 September to 31 July; they are closed in August, on Christmas Eve, Easter and on official holidays. As a rule, they open at 7:00 in winter, 6:45 in summer and close at 16:00. Opening hours can also be adapted to the needs of parents.

Education sector

Public and private education in **pre-primary schools** (*nipiagogeia* – formerly kindergartens) is now officially part of the primary school system (as with the *écoles maternelles* in France) for 4 and 5 year-olds. Compulsory educational activities take place from 8:30 to 13:00 (25 hours per week), non-compulsory sessions may follow up to 16:00. A pre-primary school can also open as early as 7:45 if more than five children are enrolled for the full-day programme. Children who live more than 1.2 km from the facility are transported there free of charge.

Private kindergartens follow the same organisational structures as public ones.

In 2022, there were a total of 5,734 preschools in Greece, 85.5% of which had public providers (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Provider structures

Nurseries, extended nurseries and childcare centres (ISCED 01) may be run by municipal or private providers or in municipal-private partnership. The majority are public. In 2022, overall there were 4,040 of these ECEC settings.

Table 1

Greece: Number of settings in the childcare sector by provider type, 2022/2023

Provider type	Nursery (<i>vrefikos stathmos</i> , 0–2, 2½–4)	Childcare centre (<i>paidikos stathmos</i>)	Total number of settings in the childcare sector
Public	764	1,125	1,889
Private	717	1,434	2,151
Total	2,151	1,889	4,040

Source: EETAA 2023

Most pre-primary settings in Greece are public. According to Eurostat data as well as to data of the national statistic, 11.9% of children (3–6) attended settings under private ownership in 2021 (Eurostat 2023e and *table 2*). The number of private pre-primary schools is increasing slightly: while in 2020/21, 722 of them were public, in 2022 the figure was 833 (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Greece: Number of pre-primary schools and children enrolled by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of pre-primary schools (4-5)	Number of children enrolled*	Relative share of pre-primary settings, in %
Public	4,901	154,311	85.5
Private	833	20,797	14.5
Total	5,734	175,108	

Source: Eurydice 2023, 2.8; *Hellenic Statistical Authority 2023, 135, data from 2020/21

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to Eurostat data, the enrolment rates of under 3 year-olds in centre-based childcare settings quadrupled between 2005 (7%) and 2022 (29.1%). In 2022, 80.5% of children between 3 years of age and the start of primary school attended an ECEC setting, an increase of nearly 20% since 2005.

Table 3

Greece: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	3	27
	Over 30 hours	4	34
	No enrolment in ECEC	92	38

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2010	1 to 29 hours	3	46
	Over 30 hours	5	23
	No enrolment in ECEC	92	31
2015	1 to 29 hours	4.9	41.1
	Over 30 hours	6.5	26.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	88.6	32.9
2022	1 to 29 hours	8.7	39.8
	Over 30 hours	20.4	40.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	70.9	19.5

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

In recent years, parental demand for childcare places for under 4 year-olds has exceeded the number of places available – both in public and in private settings.

Although the two years preceding primary school are now compulsory, only 82.8% of 4 to 5 year-olds are enrolled in a setting, but almost all 5 to 6 year-olds.

Table 4

Greece: Number and enrolment rates of children in ISCED-02 settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rates in %
4 year-olds	82,171	82.8
5 year-olds	90,143	92.6
6 year-olds	3,575	3.7

Source: Eurostat 2023f, j

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, public expenditure on early childhood education and care totalled 0.34% of the GDP (OECD 2023).

ECEC settings for children under 4 years of age and also the compulsory pre-primary groups are generally financed by state funds through municipal budgets. The salaries of municipal childcare centres are funded by the Ministry of the Interior through the municipalities in the form of regular monthly subsidies.

In public pre-primary settings, education for 4 and 5 year-olds is free of charge. In facilities for children under 4 years of age, monthly contributions based on income may be charged, especially for meals. Transport to the ECEC setting may be reimbursed under certain circumstances (e.g. income, distance, child's disability).

The Ministry of Education is also responsible for private pre-primary education settings. However, enrolment at a private institution that is not subsidised by the state is subject to fees set by the institution; these are significantly higher than in municipal settings. Parents do not have to pay fees if their annual income is below €15,000 (Megalonidaou 2020).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 6% of net household income on childcare costs⁴ (OECD.Stat 2023).

⁴ The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.



Staff to child ratios and group size in centre-based settings

In municipal nurseries, children are divided into two age-groups (2 months to 1½ years; 1½ to 2½ years). The groups consist of a maximum of 12 children, together with two qualified professionals and one assistant.

In childcare centres, children between 2½ and 3½ years form one group, those between 3½ and entry into a pre-primary group/unit another. The maximum number of children in a group is 25, supervised by one core professional and one assistant.

In pre-primary schools, the composition of each class includes children from both age groups, half 4 to 5 year-olds and half 5 to 6 year-olds. This is done on purpose. If there are more than 25 children registered, either a second group can be formed if this is possible in terms of room space, or 25 children are selected based on the distance of their permanent residence from the school, the rest are distributed to other settings which are closer to their home.

In 2020/21, the staffing ratio in public pre-primary settings was much better than in private ones (1:9.3 and 1:15.7 respectively (Hellenic Statistic Authority 2023, 135).

For a pre-primary school to be able to operate as a full-day setting (optional half-day provision alongside the compulsory half-day), the following conditions have to be met: in small *nipiagogeia* with only one teacher, at least five children need to be enrolled, in settings with two teachers at least ten children and in pre-primary schools with three or more teachers, at least 14 children (Eurydice 2023, 5.1).

Table 5

Greece: Maximum number of children per staff member and per qualified professional and maximum group size, by age

Age-group	Max. number of children per staff member	Max. number of children per core practitioner	Max. number of children per group
Under 3 years	4	6	12
3 year-olds	13	25	25
4 and 5 year-olds	25	25	25

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 154

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

There is no national curriculum for work with under 4 year-olds in **childcare settings**. The respective centre-specific programmes are based on the standard regulations and also include free play activities, group activities and quiet times. Goals for children under 2½ years of age are primarily to develop their social, emotional, intellectual and motor skills in a safe environment. For older children, group play and encouragement to develop initial reading, writing and maths skills are also common features of the programme. Helping to mitigate educational inequalities and to make parents aware of educational and psychological issues are also general goals.

Education sector

In the compulsory **pre-primary curricular framework** for 4 and 5 year-olds (2003), there are guidelines on educational activities in five learning areas: (1) language; (2) mathematics; (3) environmental studies; (4) creativity and expression; and (5) information and communication technologies. The educational and learning processes are oriented towards free and organised play activities that take into account the children's needs and interests as well as their competences,

prior knowledge and individual learning pace. Compulsory activities take place from 8:30 to 13:00 and are complemented by four non-compulsory hours per day. The compulsory part includes a pilot initiative to promote new topics such as social skills, life skills, digital literacy and scientific literacy, as well as two hours of English per week.

Professionals are supported in the implementation of the curriculum through guidelines (Ministerial Decision No. 21072b/G2/28-2-2003). The curriculum and support materials for professionals (and parents) were prepared under the supervision of the Institute for Education Policy (*Instituto Ek-paideutikäs Politikäs, IEP*) and approved by the Ministry of Education.

In 2022, a revision of the national curriculum took place (Eurydice 2022). The focus was on children and their well-being as well as openness to social challenges. Also highlighted are the individuality of the children, learning in the community, learning environments, the promotion of self-motivation and communication, as well as the challenges posed by the rapid growth in the field of new technologies. In the context of global education, since 2021/22, English is now taught in pre-primary education and digital technologies have been introduced as a tool for research and learning.

Digital education

Information and communication technology is explicitly mentioned as an area of learning in the current pre-primary curriculum. Moreover, a pilot project was carried out in 2020/21 which, among other things, aimed to develop digital skills. As early as 2003, a project was carried out in western Greece including 653 pre-primary settings (kindergartens) and schools, in which network equipment, hardware and software as well as technical support were provided (CTI 2021).

The revised national curriculum (Eurydice 2023) focuses mainly on the:

- Acquisition of knowledge of basic IT concepts and the ability to use basic IT environments
- Competent use of digital tools for research, creativity, communication and education in the context of the themes of the curriculum and everyday school life
- Recognition and solving of technical problems
- Development of a digital identity (e-citizenship).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

There is no formal assessment for children under 4 years of age in **childcare settings**. However, professionals are expected to inform parents about their children's development once a month. Observations are considered the most important tool for child assessments, both in an ongoing form and as regular on-the-spot observations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 103).

Such formative assessment of children in **pre-primary settings** is integrated into the daily routine. The professional determines a child's knowledge and experience at the beginning and tries to match learning processes to this. At the end, the progress of each child is considered and compared with the achievement of the goals of the centre-specific programme. The child's portfolio is also used for the assessments. Moreover, children are encouraged to assess their own progress.

Evaluation procedures involve the parents and specialist staff. On the basis of their assessments, teachers give the parents advice on how to support the learning process at home. In the case of

serious difficulties confirmed by a paediatrician or more than 100 days of absence, it is possible for a child to repeat a year in the pre-primary school. Children receive an official certificate of attendance at the end of their pre-primary years, which is a prerequisite for entry into primary school.

Centre-level assessment

There are no regulations or recommendations regarding self-evaluation procedures in the **child-care sector** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

Annual self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures in **pre-primary schools** are regulated by law (Law 4692/2020). According to Presidential Decision 79 (Official Gazette 109, 2017), kindergartens have to evaluate their educational work at the end of each scholastic year and make suggestions for improvement for the next year. In 2019/20 a new framework came into force (Ministerial Decision, Official Gazette (FEK) 16, 2019) which defines thematic areas for evaluation and also provides templates for the report.

The self-evaluation is carried out annually by the centre heads/principals. The objectives are to assess the educational programme, to define improvement strategies and to track implementation procedures and outcomes. The evaluation is based on 15 quality indicators which cover, for example, buildings and room space, human and financial resources, management, curricular effectiveness, and the assessment of children's personal and social development and achievements.

Regional Centres for Educational Planning (*Perifereiaká Kéntra Ekpaideftikoú Schedias-mou, PEKES*) support professionals in assessing their educational work. The institutions themselves are responsible for preparing an annual self-evaluation report, about which the regional supervisors are then informed. They use the self-evaluation reports to make suggestions for the next year's planning.

External evaluation

External evaluations in **childcare settings** focus primarily on structural quality and are carried out regularly by regional supervisors (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125).

The independent authority for "Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Schools" (*Archä Diasphalisäs täs Poiotätas stän Protobathmiakai Deuterobathmia Ekpaideusä, ADIPPDE*) is responsible for example: monitoring and evaluating the implementation of education programmes; evaluating the quality of work in **pre-primary education** and schools; monitoring the evaluation of pedagogical staff; and for the meta-evaluation of quality assurance measures. *ADIPPDE* establishes criteria and indicators for the evaluations and, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, develops an integrated information system and database for educational evaluation. It also provides support to the institutions and its agencies regarding self-evaluation and carries out research projects, and cooperates with international networks. *ADIPPDE* also takes into account the reports on external evaluations prepared by the Regional Centres for Educational Planning (PEKE).

For each education department, the *ADIPPDE* sets up an evaluation committee with five members. On the basis of pre-determined criteria, a report based on document analysis or on visits to the institutions is prepared and submitted to the *ADIPPDE* Board of Directors, which evaluates these reports. Both the reports and the decisions are published on the *ADIPPDE* website.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Guidelines for the organisation of education and care for children with special needs are set out in a statutory framework (Law 3699/2008; amendments: 4713/2020). This specifies that the state is obliged to provide appropriate educational support at all levels of education. In general, children with special needs are to be integrated into mainstream institutions whenever possible. Currently, a "Strategic Action Plan" is being implemented, which contains 13 goals. These include promoting and improving accessibility to inclusive programmes. Center for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support and Interdisciplinary Education, Evaluation and Support Committees provide assistance by recommending the appropriate institution and support for a child. Children have the option of attending either a mainstream institution, a group with support from support staff or specially equipped integrative groups.

Children with disabilities or special educational needs may attend a special needs setting up to the age of 7. As in mainstream pre-primary education, the Institute for Educational Policy is responsible for developing and organising an appropriate educational curriculum. In addition to a general curriculum, there are also programmes tailored to specific needs/disabilities. The development of curricula for support institutions is regulated by law and a personalised educational plan is prepared for each child. The exact schedule (25 hours per week) is prescribed by Ministerial Decree 85317/2019.

In 2022, there were 114 municipal pre-primary settings specifically for children with special educational needs (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Children with a migration background

Children with a migration background are to be integrated into ECEC settings with respect for their culture and language. In recent years, the education of children from refugee families and their inclusion has also been a predominant goal. Although the number of asylum seekers and refugees has decreased somewhat compared to previous years, in 2023 Greece recorded 21,100 asylum seekers and 70,000 refugees. Most of them came from Ukraine (25,000), followed by persons from Syria (16,453) and Afghanistan (15,062) (UNHCR 2023).

Since 2016, a project supported by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund has ensured access to early childhood education specifically for children of refugee and migrant families. A special education programme for so-called "reception or preparation groups" makes it easier for children in reception camps in particular to attend regular institutions. Within the camps there are pre-primary groups for 4 to 5 year-olds that work according to the regular curriculum (European Commission 2020, 123).

In 2022, 7.1% of the population held a non-Greek citizenship, the same as in the age group of children under 5 years (7%). 15.4% of the total non-Greek population came from other EU27 countries, for the under 5 year-olds this rate was 8.2% (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

Parental leave arrangements⁵

Private sector leaves are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs whereas public sector leaves are regulated by the Ministry of the Interior.

⁵ The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Greece by Evi Hatzivarnava-Kazassi and Maria Karamessini in the *19th International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Maternity leave (*Adeia Mitrotitas*): In the private sector, compulsory basic Maternity leave is fully paid and lasts 17 weeks, of which eight weeks must be taken before and nine weeks after the birth. Employees have to have worked for 200 days during the previous two years. This can be followed by a special Maternity leave (*Eidiki Adeia gia tñn Prostasia tās Mitrotitas*), which lasts nine months paid at minimum wage level. Up to seven months can be transferred to fathers.

In the public sector, Maternity leave, which is also compulsory and fully paid, lasts five months, of which two must be taken before and three after the birth. There are no conditions linked to the length of former employment.

Paternity leave (*Adeia Gennisis Teknu*): In both the private and public sectors, fathers are granted 14 working days around the time of birth, fully paid (by the employer).

Parental leave (*Goniki Adeia Anatrophis*): In the private sector (including teachers without a permanent employment relationship) each parent can take four months altogether, two months paid at minimum wage level and two months unpaid. This leave is non-transferable and can be taken up to the child's 8th birthday. If both parents work for the same private employer, they cannot take parental leave at the same time.

In the public sector, employees can be granted leave for up to five years if requested and up to their child's 8th birthday, although only the first two months are paid corresponding to the minimum wage, the rest is unpaid.

Childcare leave: In addition, each parent has the right to work two hours less per day at full pay in the private sector for the first 12 months after Maternity leave and one hour less per day for another six months. These reductions can also include more hours over a shorter period of time or be taken in different blocks of time within a 30-month period after Maternity leave. The leave is a family entitlement and parents decide who and for how long each will take this fully compensated leave.

In the public sector, instead of reducing weekly working hours, it is also possible to take nine months of fully paid childcare leave after maternity leave or has two hours less work per day up to the child's 2. birthday and one hour less if the child is between 2 and 4.

In both cases, Childcare leave is paid by the employer.

Statistical data on the uptake of Parental and Childcare leave do not exist.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Greece

Country expert assessment by Maria Sakellariou

Meeting current challenges in the field of Education are first and foremost a question of sufficient **investment** in key components of the education system as a whole. These include improving the quality of education, the continuing professional development of teachers, labour relations and the financing of Education (operational, infrastructure, logistical), strengthening inclusion practices in order to deal positively with diversity and the increasing social and cultural heterogeneity within the population, utilising research and innovative initiatives, utilising digital technology in the promotion of learning and development, and ensuring smooth transitions both from one educational level to another and also from one setting to another within each level.

A great challenge for ECEC is that of **providing quality education** for all children. In terms of pre-primary settings for the 4 and 5 year-olds, this is achieved through a strong, inclusive and publicly funded school system. The universal provision of quality early childhood education and care

mitigates against inequalities and exclusion, works to compensate for learning and developmental deficits and supports the inalienable right of every child to quality education. The challenge of quality early childhood education is considered pivotal, as it lays the foundations for successful lifelong learning (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019; European Union 2021).

However, in Greece, care and education **do not form a single educational system** in the years preceding primary schooling; they are framed within education policy on the one hand and social policy on the other. “Education” is provided for 4 and 5 year-olds in public (fee-free) and private kindergartens, with the Ministry of Education being responsible for the administrative and educational organisation and the municipalities (through the School Committees) for financial matters concerning equipment and operational issues. “Care, education and social support” for children up to compulsory education at age 4 is provided in municipal and private nurseries and childcare centres under the supervision of local government authorities and at the national level under the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour. In other words, at the level of service provision, the presence of a dichotomous model between educational and social policy can be observed.

With the election of a new political leadership in the Ministry of Education, a Government intention was announced to place municipal and private nurseries and kindergartens under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, accompanied by relevant evaluation studies. This emphasis on “education” as a key point of reference for the future of ECEC in Greece constitutes an important indicator of change and paradigm shift; it also presents a significant challenge for the structural reorganising of a “Unified Early Childhood Education”.

A further challenge within ECEC is to ensure the **smooth transitions** of children from the family to nursery, from nursery to kindergarten and from kindergarten to primary school with the cooperation of all those in the local community involved.

As far as operational issues are concerned, it is a constant challenge to provide **CPD support** for all teachers in kindergartens, nurseries and childcare centres in a uniform and ongoing way, although it is obvious that this is the key to ensuring the quality of early childhood education and care in the context of a common vision. The role of ECEC (Unified Early Childhood Education) and Training is multi-layered and complex, as there is a need to develop a collective professional identity that meets the needs of 21st century learning, within the context of the operation of all structures of early childhood education as a learning community.

In the context of all the above challenges, providing continuous internal and external evaluation of all ECEC structures within a common evaluation framework, with the purpose of improving the quality of education and of the services in general, is of major importance.

Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Greece was 10,459,782. It increased steadily until 2010, then started to decrease (2000: 10,775,627, 2005: 10,969,912, 2010: 11,119,289, 2015: 10,858,018, 2020: 10,718,565) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.43, Greece is below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)⁶.

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6

Greece: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	84,618
1 year-olds	84,613
2 year-olds	83,768
3 year-olds	86,019
4 year-olds	87,170
5 year-olds	90,421
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	516,609

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.4% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 4.9% were children under 6 years of age. For about 20 years, the shares of both age groups have been slightly below the respective EU averages.

Table 7

Greece: Share of children under 6 years of age in the total population compared with other EU countries, 2000 - 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Greece/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Greece	2.8	2.8	5.6
	Ø EU15 ⁷	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Greece	2.9	2.9	5.8
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Greece	2.6	3.0	5.6
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Greece	2.4	2.5	4.9
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

⁶ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>)

⁷ The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under 6 years of age

The majority of households (84.3%) with children under 6 in Greece in 2022 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for only 0.6% - exclusively single mothers.

Table 8

Greece: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	834,800	
Couple households	703,700	84.3
Other types of households	126,400	15.1
Single households, total	4,800	0.6
Single households, women	4,800	0.6
Single households, men	--	

Source: Eurostat 2023i, *own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Greece, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 77.5% and for women 61.4% (Eurostat 2023k).

In 2022, 58.1% of women and 88.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly above the EU-average (87.2%) while those of mothers were well below the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023i, own calculations).

Table 9a

Greece: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Greece	54.0	91.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁸	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Greece	58.1	88.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁹	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023i

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b*.

⁸ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

⁹ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	n.d.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)	75.6	92.1	++72.3	++79.2
with dependent children	72.4	93.1	++72.1 (2023)	++79.4 (2023)
with children under 2 years	70.7	95.0		
with children 3–4 years				

*Eurostat 2023i, 2023k

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹⁰

In 2022, 24.4% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was higher than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 26.3% in Greece, compared to 21.6% for the European average. 7% of children under 6 and 5.8% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

¹⁰ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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