



# OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

[WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU](http://WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU)

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

## GREECE

### 2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Although Greece was identified by the European Commission in 2014 as one of the countries with a need to implement deinstitutionalisation (DI) reform, the Greek government has not taken adequate measures to respond. The conditionality to use Structural Funds in line with deinstitutionalisation strategy and action plan has not been fulfilled either and the country still does not have relevant policies to proceed with child protection and care reform. In Greece, there is general perception that institutions are an appropriate solution for children in out-of-home care. Despite the obstacles towards the implementation of the reform of child protection, in 2018, the long-awaited legislation on foster care and adoption was voted in. This enables children without parental care to be placed in foster care or to be adopted under specific safeguards.

The alternative care for children in Greece is provided by various organisations including public, private and church-run entities. There is a lack of a transparent registration system, and no quality standards framework for children's care providers.

In 2014, there were 2,850 children in Greek institutions, out of whom 900 were children with disabilities and 150 children under the age of three. Civil society organisations are calling for an immediate closure of these institutions as an important step to progress with deinstitutionalisation reform.

After many years of advocacy efforts, mainly from civil society, the new Law on Foster Care was adopted in May 2018 and came into force in September 2018. This progressive legislation will enable the development of family-based forms of care for children in Greece which, in turn, will help to catalyse deinstitutionalisation reform at national level. According to campaign's evidence, foster care has been greatly underdeveloped in Greece. Moreover, due to the lack of community-based services and financial support, young adults with disabilities who grew up in foster families are getting re-institutionalised. To implement the new legislation, national and local authorities must take many actions. Foster care parents should receive adequate training and ongoing support, both emotional and financial, in order to be able to provide high quality care for children. Social workers should also receive necessary training since foster care has not been considered as an alternative care option in Greece yet.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**TAKE ACTION TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE MEMBER STATE TO ADOPT A NATIONAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

**ON DEINSTITUTIONALISATION. THIS WILL ENABLE SYSTEMIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AT A NATIONAL LEVEL AS WELL AS AN EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT OF HOW NATIONAL AND EU FUNDS ARE USED FOR DEINSTITUTIONALISATION**

It is expected that the new legislation will help to reduce the procedural burden of foster care proceedings and will ensure investment in public awareness raising, training and supervision of foster carers. Overall, the new legislation is a good step forward towards the development of quality family-based care in Greece.

Over the past years, Greece has been hit by an influx of refugees including unaccompanied minors. According to the National Centre for Social Solidarity<sup>1</sup>, there were 3,741 unaccompanied children in 2018 in Greece. Out of the total number, the majority are boys (93,8%) and 7,2% are children under the age of 14. 1,064 of unaccompanied children stay in the long-term accommodation (shelters), 895 children live in temporary accommodation and 1,983 children are placed in out of long term or temporary accommodation (protective custody, pending transfer to long-term or temporary accommodation<sup>2</sup>. In other words, more than 1,900 children do not have proper accommodation and care that make them vulnerable to child trafficking, prostitution, etc. Out of 3,741 migrant children in Greece, only 1,500 have access to education and health care services.

Greece relies heavily on civil society for the protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant and refugee children. Although the EU has allocated vast amounts of money through Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the fund for humanitarian aid for the protection of children in migration, it seems that the funds do not cover their needs since thousands of children are still not protected and they grow up in dangerous conditions that impact their development. Instead we see new camps and state or private institutions being supported in order to host migrant minors which is a direct violation of their rights. In addition, it is of worry, that none of these actions funded by EU have been allocated towards the strengthening of the country's mainstream child protection system.

The use of European Investment and Structural Funds is not accessible to local NGOs, although they may convene innovative projects to improve the quality of family- and community-based care for children. Other challenges include vested interests, generally positive public perception of institutional care and non-transparent management of the EU funds with priority given to public agencies only.

Without efficient cooperation with relevant stakeholders, the progress with DI reforms is not possible and therefore stagnating in Greece. The Opening Doors campaign welcomes the new law on foster care as a significant step forward towards development of family-based care in Greece. However, much more remains to be done including adoption of a comprehensive strategy and action plan on deinstitutionalisation that will enable allocation and use of EU funds for systemic implementation of DI reform.

1 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67534>

2 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/partners/view/509>

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



**TAKE ACTION TO PROCEED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF DI REFORM BY BRIDGING FURTHER INVESTMENTS FROM EU AND NATIONAL BUDGETS WITH BROADER COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND USE OF THEIR EXPERTISE**

## OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN GREECE



Roots Research Center is working with adult adoptees who aim to find their biological parents, also they are supporting/consulting adopted families to work with their adopted children. Since 2004 they promote foster care, give speeches around the country, raising public awareness on the benefits of foster care and why community based care is better for children. They have been involved in private foster care cases of children with disabilities, supporting and consulting the foster parents. They run training seminars for social workers and University students promoting foster care and community based care. Other NGOs have showed interest, cooperating with them, in training their people on the DI direction, by supporting vulnerable families. Justice experts are their supporters on child protection affairs, walking with them slowly on the way to change the residential culture in Greece. To find out more visit

[www.roots-research-center.gr](http://www.roots-research-center.gr)

## NATIONAL PARTNERS

Federation of Women's Associations of Heraklion Crete, Iliachtida, Family support center of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens Foundation Family and Children Support Center, NGO Association of adoptive families Amfidoron, Therapeutic riding association, Association of Juvenile Court Curators NGO Federation of Greece, Network for Children's Rights

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign supports national efforts to develop child protection systems that strengthen families and ensure high-quality family and community-based alternative care for children, by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity in civil society.

It is a partnership between 5 international organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For more information go to [www.openingdoors.eu](http://www.openingdoors.eu)