



Greece

Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children

A Study of National Policies

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Content

Summary.....	4
1. Description and analysis of the extent and nature of child poverty and wellbeing in Greece.....	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Recent trends in child poverty in Greece	7
1.3 Child material deprivation	12
1.4 Child care facilities.....	12
1.5 Access to education.....	13
1.6 Access to health and social services	14
2. Description and assessment of the overall framework for coordinating and developing policies – Identification and assessment of the main policies in place to both prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion and to promote the wellbeing of children in Greece.	15
2.1 The policy framework – the main policy measures	15
2.2 Violence against children	19
2.3 Family and peer relations	20
3. Description and assessment of the arrangements in place in Greece for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion amongst children and to promote the wellbeing of children	20
4. Concluding remarks.....	21
References.....	22

Summary

In recent years, the issue of child poverty has undoubtedly been steadily growing in importance in almost all EU Member-States, in the context of the Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion. Greece is no exception to this. Yet, contrary to other countries, combating child poverty in Greece has not as yet become a key priority for social policy. This is reflected in the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008, where the issue of child poverty is mainly tackled through the reconciliation of work and family perspective (parental leave, income support, childcare facilities etc.). No specific strategy or consistent plan for integrated action has been foreseen in this respect.

This view is also echoed by the 2007 Eurochild Report. The Report concludes that tackling child poverty and social exclusion — and ensuring a decent standard of living for all children, irrespective of their social background and health status — seems not to be a policy priority for Greece's contemporary social policy.

The findings of the 2007 UNICEF Report, which assesses children's wellbeing in terms of material and non-material dimensions in 21 OECD countries, show that Greece is ranked 13th, which constitutes a rather moderate position. Another comparative research study carried out among the EU-25 Member States, using a different methodology, ranks children's wellbeing in Greece in 16th position.

Despite the fact that there is a lack of appropriate statistical data and common measurement methods both at national and EU-25 levels, available data from various sources reveal that, in recent years, child poverty rates in Greece have been somewhat diminishing. Results based on the data of the 'Statistics on Income and Living Conditions' Survey (EU-SILC) show that the child poverty rates in Greece — shown as the percentage of children aged 0-17 from the total number of people living in low income households, i.e. the 60 % threshold — were 21.0 % in 2003, 20.0 % in 2004 and 19.0 % in 2005. These rates, apart from being just below the national average poverty rates, do not differ significantly from the respective EU-25 average child poverty rates.

Nevertheless, in Greece in 2003 there were more than 460 000 children under 18 years old living in households facing income poverty. The data reveal that the rate of child poverty is positively related to the age and employment status of the head of household: too young, too old, unemployed and retired. Poorer children finish early with compulsory education more often than the children from wealthier households, and are often more frequently engaged in the labour market.

Education seems to be a 'reproductive' factor, meaning that a low level of education among parents is translated into a higher risk for a low level of education among their children. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it appears that the children of impoverished parents are at a much higher risk of 'falling through the cracks' (leaving school, dropping out) of the educational system and at an even higher risk of never returning to school to complete basic education or to learn a trade or skill. These factors are key determinants of falling, or remaining, in poverty.

Affordable childcare services are still not widely available for pre-school children and particularly for infants. Moreover, only employed women have access to them, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women seeking jobs. For some population groups in particular, particularly in the case of single-parent families, this non-availability of childcare facilities and services makes it increasingly difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. Various empirical findings suggest that there is an acute 'welfare deficit' in terms of the services provided to children and families in difficulty.

Existing income schemes for families in difficulty neither constitute minimum income schemes, nor a safety net for children. Allowances, benefits and tax relief measures appear to have had a negligible impact on decreasing child poverty. A study assessing the impact of financial transfers to households for alleviating child poverty in Southern European countries reveals that these transfers are very ineffective given that 'a great number of poor households with children are not eligible for income support (as in Greece and Italy) or receive low benefits (as in Spain and Portugal)' ¹. In other words, it may be said that social policy in Greece is still short of becoming the main instrument for income redistribution.

Overall, it may be said that the policy measures implemented to tackle child poverty are not focused on poor children, but rather on supporting the family and children in general. They are therefore short of constituting an integrated policy response to the specific problems of child poverty. The lack of close interaction and synergy between the various social policy related measures and actions in this area render the situation even more difficult.

Finally, it should be emphasised that research on the issues of poverty, social exclusion and social inequality has never been given a high priority by the State. In addition, when research has been undertaken, the results yielded have not been taken on board in the social policy development process in Greece. As a result, informational gaps concerning these issues remain, particularly from a child poverty perspective. This is also linked to the fact that there is a complete lack of a coherent monitoring system to monitor progress of the implementation of related measures and to evaluate their impact on child poverty.

1. Description and analysis of the extent and nature of child poverty and wellbeing in Greece

1.1 Introduction

During the last decade, Greece has exhibited a steadily high economic growth, while according to official projections, this good economic performance will continue for at least the next two years (i.e. 2007-2008). Greece's population has exhibited a slight increase over the last fifteen years, mainly due to the massive influx of immigrants during the period 1992-2000. However, the child population (children aged 0-19 years) has presented a downward trend in absolute and relative terms during the last fifteen years, mainly due to the diminishing birth rate ². In 1991, there were 2.7 million children (aged 0-19), which represented 26.6 % of the total population, while in 2004 the respective number was estimated at 2.2 million children, representing only 20.2 % of the total population ³.

The findings of a recent report on child wellbeing in rich countries show that the average ranking position for Greece is 13th among the 21 countries assessed ⁴. This report constitutes a comparative assessment based on a measurement of the following six dimensions: material wellbeing, health and safety, educational wellbeing, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks and subjective wellbeing. Despite the self-reported drawbacks in the methodology applied for the measurement of child wellbeing, the study clearly attempts to overcome the single dimensional approach of income poverty and to monitor 'child wellbeing' at a comparative transnational level. A more extended research activity

¹ Matsaganis M., et al, 2004, p. 16.

² The total fertility rate in Greece was 2.2 children per woman in 1960. Yet, in 1994 this rate was found to be 1.4 and in 2005 the rate was 1.3. This percentage is 0.8 units lower than the fertility rate for population reproduction. Eurostat, Queen Tree database, 2007.

³ Data extracted from: www.statistics.gr

⁴ UNICEF, 2007, p. 2.

has also been carried out on child wellbeing in the then EU-25 Member-States by using 51 variables, structured in 23 domains which, in turn, form 8 clusters: children's material situation, housing, health, subjective wellbeing, education, children's relationships, civic participation, and risk and safety. This study ranked Greece in 16th position among the then EU-25 ⁵.

Such a multidimensional approach seems to be of a great necessity given the fact that to date there exist various methodologies concerning the measurement of child poverty, which bring up a number of serious conceptual and empirical problems. For example, as far as the measurement of child poverty in Greece is concerned, it becomes evident from the relevant data shown in Table 1 in the following section, that no common methodology is used. That is to say, various studies on child poverty use different age cohorts for children, different poverty line thresholds, different equivalence scales and different data sources. In addition, there is a lack of time series data for the period 1994-2005. All these 'inconsistencies' lead to the inability of proper monitoring as regards the extent of child poverty in Greece during the abovementioned time period.

In addition to the approaches focusing on child wellbeing, the OECD and the European Union's Statistical Service (Eurostat) are using methodologies which are focused on the measurement of income poverty. Overall, however, it may be said that the abovementioned methodologies which attempt to measure child poverty (wellbeing and income poverty) share a common negative characteristic, namely the hypothesis of equal intra-household distribution of resources. The existing statistical data on child poverty is therefore the by-product of field research activities focused on households rather than on children. In this way, it is not possible to know the extent and severity of child poverty per se, but rather only the characteristics of children who live in poor households. There is therefore a need for field research surveys on the socioeconomic situation of children across all EU Member States, based on commonly agreed standards, such as: age cohorts, equivalence scales and monitoring and evaluation indicators. The design and implementation of such surveys are expected to overcome the serious drawbacks of existed measurement methodologies and to contribute to our understanding of the comparative accurate extent of poverty and social exclusion among children.

As far as Greece is concerned, apart from the drawbacks of existing measurement methodologies, it should be pointed out that there is an apparent lack of hard evidence as regards poverty and social exclusion and, in particular, child poverty. Research on these issues has never been given a high priority by the State in Greece, and neither have any links been established between research/research outputs and the formulation of related social policy responses. Besides this, it is very rare that research results have been taken on board in the social policy development process in Greece.

This being the case, it is evident that the range of available data as regards the extent and nature of child poverty in Greece is rather limited. For the purposes of this Report, therefore, various international sources containing data on child poverty in Greece have been utilised. Comparisons of the relevant data presented in Table 1 in the following section should, however, be made with caution, given that they are based on different measurement methodologies.

⁵ Bradshaw J., Hoelscher P., Richardson D., 2006, "AN INDEX OF CHILD WELLBEING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION", Social Indicators Research, Vol. 80: 133-177, Springer, p.133 and 170.
<http://springerlink.metapress.com/content/F3642p2x00hn5h01/fulltext.pdf>

1.2 Recent trends in child poverty in Greece

As regards the evolution of child poverty in Greece, according to various data sources, it appears that the child poverty rate has shown a slightly diminishing trend in relative terms during the period 1980-2000, which was followed by a slight upward trend until 2003 and has slightly declined since then.

More specifically, a recent OECD paper notes that child poverty rates in Greece, using the 50 % poverty line threshold, exhibited a slightly diminishing trend during the period 1980-2000, from 12.7 % to 12.4 %⁶.

On the other hand, according to other available statistical data and using the 60 % poverty line threshold, the rate of child poverty increased from 1995 to 2003: from 19 % in 1995 to 21 % in 2000 and has risen up to 21.2 % in 2003 (Table 1, Lines 3 and 4). Moreover, in 2003, the rate of child poverty measured as a percentage of the total population of children in Greece, was found to be 23.5 % (Table 1, Line 4), which constitutes some 460 000 children under 18 years of age (see also Table 2).

⁶ Calculated from OECD Income Distribution Study, poverty line set at 50 percent of median disposable adjusted income, OECD equivalence scales. See, Whiteford P., Adema W., 2007, Table 2, p. 18.

Table 1: Child poverty rates in Greece: 1994-2005

Sources/ Year		1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Poverty line at 60 % of the median income													
1	GR	21.6							18.3				
	EU-11	19.5							19.3				
2	GR											20.1	
	EU-25											19.0	
3			19					21					
4											21.2a 23.5b		
5	GR					17.0							
	IT					20.7							
	ES					18.3							
	PO					22.0							
6	GR										23.0		
7	GR					21.0							
8	GR										23.1		
9	GR										21.0	20.0	19.0
	EU-25										19.0	20.0	-
Poverty line at 50 % of the median income													
10	GR							12.4					
	OECD							11.2					
11	GR							12.9					
	EU-8+*							11.0					

Sources:

(1): Bourreau-Dubois, C., Maitre B., ECHP data 1994-2001, child less than 18 years old, OECD equivalence scale, poverty line 60 % of median income.

- (2) Joint report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007, 2007, child 0-17 years old, poverty threshold 60 % of median income.
- (3) Hoelcher, P., 2004, poverty threshold 60 % of median income, p. 25.
- (4) Bouzas N. 2006, child less than 18 years old, EU-SILC 2003 data income data for 2002, poverty line 60 % of median adjusted disposable income: a) poor children as a percentage of poor persons, b) poor children as a percentage of all children.
- (5) Matsaganis M., et al, 2005, EUROMOD data, child 0-17 years old, poverty line is equal to 60 % of national median equivalent disposable income, modified OECD equivalence scale.
- (6) Bradshaw J., 2006, children under 16 living in households with equivalent (modified OECD) income less than 60 per cent of the median.
- (7) Bradshaw J., 2002, ECHP 1998 data-income data for previous year, poverty line at 60 % of median income.
- (8) *Ministry of Employment and Social protection, 2006, EU-SILC 2003 data –income data for 2002-, child 0-15 years old.*
- (9) Eurostat, 2007, EU-SILC, 2003-2004-2005, child less than 16 years old, cut-off point: 60 % of median equivalised income after social transfers.
- (10) UNICEF, 2007, percentage of children living in homes with equivalent incomes below 50 % of the national median.
- (11) Smeeding, T., Munzi T., 2006, * plus USA and Canada, child less than 18 years old, LIS data, poverty line 50 % of median adjusted disposable income.

However, results based on the data of the ‘Statistics on Income and Living Conditions’ Survey (EU-SILC), which use the 60 % poverty line threshold, show that the child poverty rates in Greece from 2003 to 2005 have followed a downward trend, namely 21.0 % in 2003, 20.0 % in 2004 and 19.0 % in 2005 (Table 1, Line 9). These rates, which are just below the national average poverty rate for the respective years, represent the percentage of children aged 0-17 of the total number of people living in low income households (i.e. below the 60 % threshold). The data also reveal that child poverty rates for Greece do not differ significantly from the EU-25 average child poverty rates for the respective years, as is shown in Table 1 (Lines 1 and 9).

In general, the data reveal that the rate of child poverty is positively related to the age and employment status of the head of household: too young, too old, unemployed and retired heads of household more often having children living below the poverty line. Poor children leave compulsory education prematurely more often than non-poor children, engaged in the labour market at higher percentages than non-poor children.

More specifically, the poverty of children seems to be in positive relation to their age (Table 2): “The older the children are, the more likely they are to be poor than the younger ones”⁷. Such a conclusion was valid both for 1994 and 2001. This finding, in turn, indicates the ever increasing inability of poor households to cope with the increasing needs of their children as they get older.

⁷ Bourreau-Dubois C., Maitre B, Table 2, p. 4.

Table 2: Poor children per age cohort, 2003

Age cohorts	Poor children		Poor children as % of total number of children
	Number	%	
0-5	117 919	25.6	18.9
6-11	160 655	34.9	25.0
12-17	181 632	39.9	26.3
Total	460 202	100.0	23.5

Source: N. Bouzas (2005), Table 3, p. 102.

Moreover, the probability of children living in an ‘income poor’ household is higher when the head of household has the following characteristics:

- too young (less than 24 years old)
- too old (more than 65 years old)
- unemployed
- retired
- inactive

On the other hand, the probability of children living in an ‘income poor’ household is lessened when the head of household is employed ⁸. There is no doubt that those children who live in households headed by employed persons are faced with a lower poverty risk, compared to other poor children. Employment has been considered as the best pathway to combating poverty and, to this end, a great range of policies, measures and interventions have been developed, aimed at raising employment rates for all population groups. It appears, however, that employed people with children can still be poor. According to evidence gathered, the great majority of heads of poor households are employed. From a total of 240 000 heads of poor households, it was found that more than 193 000 were employed ⁹. In other words, employment on its own is not enough to eradicate child poverty, particularly if it is not accompanied by proper salaries or adequate financial revenues for employed persons with children. This implies the activation of the principle of ‘making work pay’, which should take the form of specific measures. Until now, however, no major policy initiatives such as ‘make work pay’ policies or ‘welfare to work’ policies have been introduced in Greece, as opposed to most other European Union Member States.

Moreover, children living in certain geographical regions (there are 13 of them in Greece) are confronted with a higher probability of living in households with restricted financial resources, due both to the regional socioeconomic situation and the specific needs of households in the specific area. It has been estimated, based on EU-SILC 2003 data, that deploying the indicator of child poverty as the percentage of children living in poor households to all children in every region, three regions (East Macedonia and Thrace, Western Greece and Southern Aegean) present child poverty rates at a much higher level than the national average: these percentages were found to be between 35 % and 37 % in comparison to the

⁸ Bouzas, N., (2005), Tables 1 and 2, p. 101.

⁹ Ibid, table 1, p. 101.

23 % national average. Four regions present child poverty rates around 30 % (Western Macedonia, Ipeiros, Central Greece and Peloponnese), another three regions present child poverty rates around the national average (Central Macedonia, Thessaly and Ionian Islands), while the remaining three regions present child poverty rates lower than the national average (Attica, North Aegean and Crete) ¹⁰. In other words, the distribution of child poverty is unequal across the regions of Greece, therefore indicating the need to develop policy priorities for eradicating child poverty at regional level.

Households with many children are confronted with high at-risk-poverty rates. It has been found that when the number of children in the household is more than three, the poverty rate gets ever higher. In 2003, the poverty rate for households with one child was 19.4 %, while for those with three children the respective rate was 33.4 %. In those households with more than five children the respective rate was more than 70 % ¹¹.

The same situation applies to single parent families in Greece. Single parent families with children seem to present a high probability of living under severe income poverty ¹². Indeed, evidence suggests that, although single parent households in Greece constitute only a small minority of all households (2 %) as well as of households with children (4 %), they are amongst the most vulnerable groups in terms of poverty and social exclusion. In particular, a recent report on single parent families in Greece, based on EU-SILC data for the year 2004, shows, among other things, that the poverty rate of single parent households is 34.4 %, which is found to be significantly higher than that of two-parent households, i.e. 20.4 % ¹³.

Moreover, a recent study on the socio-economic situation of single parents in Greece concluded that “social transfers are very limited and constitute a small part of the total economic resources of single parent households” ¹⁴. As far as the socio-economic features of single parent families are concerned, it must be pointed out that ¹⁵:

- the majority of them are headed by a woman (92 %),
- the most common age group of the head of household is 25-49 years old (73 %),
- the vast majority of these households have 1 or 2 children (92 %),
- 82 % of single parents aged 25-49 years old are employed and 18 % are out of employment: 98 % of those employed work either as salaried personnel or are self-employed,
- the unemployment rate for single parents in the 25-49 years old age group is 13 %, which is almost double the unemployment rate of the same age group among the total active population (7 %).

The latter finding indicates that the lack of gained income from employment is greater in the case of single parents than the rest of the active population. It appears, therefore, that this specific population group needs to be targeted through a ‘make work pay’ policy. In other words, income transfers accompanied by active labour market interventions may be a step in the right direction for unemployed single parents.

¹⁰ Data extracted from: Bouzas N., 2005, Table 7, p. 105.

¹¹ Bouzas N., 2005, Table 2, p. 101.

¹² Matsaganis M., et al, 2005, Table 4, p. 4.

¹³ For a detailed analysis see Mouriki A., Michailidou M., Gazon E., 2007.

¹⁴ Kikilias H. et al, 2007, p. 24.

¹⁵ Data extracted from : Kikilias H. et al, 2007, pp.13-16.

1.3 Child material deprivation

As far as the wider notion of children's material wellbeing is concerned, the percentage of children living in a jobless household is lower than half the respective OECD average: 2.4 % in comparison to 5.0 %. In other words, the extent and severity of child poverty in Greece to a great extent seem to be linked with low earnings and to a lesser extent with lack of employment. It may be said that Greek households plan 'child births' in direct relation to ensuring steady employment.

Although the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children in Greece is not much higher than the respective OECD average, the percentage of children reporting low levels of family affluence exceeds the respective OECD average (28.7 % against 19.8 %) ¹⁶. This finding indicates that Greek children feel more deprived than the respective OECD country average. The low levels of family affluence is partly mirrored in the percentage of children reporting less than six educational possessions at home ¹⁷, which is much higher in Greece than the OECD average (61.8 % against 27.0 %) ¹⁸. It is apparent that Greek children meet more difficulties in doing their homework because of lack of space and ICT amenities. On the other hand, less Greek children seem to be culturally deprived, in comparison to the OECD average in terms of the existence of less than ten books at home (7.2 % and 7.9 % respectively) ¹⁹. In general, it may be said that Greek children appear to be slightly more optimistic and feel better than the OECD average, in terms of both higher life satisfaction rates and lower percentages of feeling like an 'outsider' or 'out of place' and 'lonely' ²⁰.

1.4 Childcare facilities

It is a common belief that the lack of adequate care services for dependent household members remains a serious obstacle, not only in relation to labour market engagement for carers (mainly women), but also in relation to improving children's sociability. In this respect, EU Member States agreed childcare targets/ coverage rates for babies and toddlers (0 to 3 years of age) at 33 % and for pre-school infant (3 years old to compulsory school age) at 90 %. The relevant coverage rates for Greece are 8 % and 70 % respectively ²¹, which are well below EU targets, indicating a waste in human resources and inadequate preschool preparation for children.

In other words, the public provision for childcare facilities for children below 3 years of age is still underdeveloped in Greece. However, public provision for childcare facilities for children between 3 and 6 years old appears, in recent years, to be more extensive. Parents with very low incomes have priority in the public run childcare centres. The latter are free in principle but, due to high demand, they often operate a system of waiting lists, where spaces are allocated to children according to the mother's employment status (employed mothers have priority) and income. In some cases, high-income families may be asked to pay a low monthly fee. However, more often than not, a combination of high demand and limited supply results in the places being filled quickly by children who come from low-income families with employed mothers ²².

¹⁶ UNICEF, 2007, p. 42.

¹⁷ These educational possessions are: a desk for study, a quiet place to work, a computer for schoolwork, educational software, an internet connection, a calculator, a dictionary and school textbooks: UNICEF, 2007, p. 11.

¹⁸ UNICEF, 2007, p. 42.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 42.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

²¹ EC, 2006b, Graphs 5 and 6, p. 8.

²² More details in: Bradshaw J., Finch N., 2002, p.28.

Overall, it may be said that affordable childcare services are still not widely available for pre-school children (0 to compulsory school age). Moreover, only employed women have access to them, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women seeking a job. For some population groups in particular, such as single parents, this non-availability of childcare facilities and services makes it increasingly difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. Besides this, there are no childcare services for women working in the afternoon and at weekends.

1.5 Access to education

The state intervention for providing education to all children presents a number of inabilities in terms of coverage rates for certain population groups (children with disabilities, immigrant children and minority children). Even if it is not possible to include enrolment rates for the abovementioned children, due to the lack of proper statistical data, a recent study on the educational situation of Roma people states that “in Greece, most Roma children either do not enrol in school, or attend irregularly and drop out at an early age. Only a minority reach mandatory secondary-school level, and 60 % are illiterate. A number of factors contribute to this poor education. School access is difficult, due to the physical remoteness of many settlements, which is compounded by municipal exclusionary practices (refusing to register students or to provide transport), while racism from teachers, pupils and their parents is common. In addition, a travelling way of life, including forced relocations due to expulsion, makes it difficult for Roma children to integrate”²³.

On a comparative basis with the OECD average of relevant various dimensions/indicators, the educational wellbeing of Greek children up to 15 years old seems to be less in terms of school achievements in relation to literacy, numeracy and science. They present almost the same participation rates, while in terms of aspirations present higher percentage of 15-19 years old not in education or employment and a smaller percentage of pupils aspiring to low skill work. It is worth noting that Greek pupils express both higher life satisfaction and school wellbeing than the average OECD pupil and a similar personal wellbeing, given that their percentages regarding ‘feeling like an outsider’, or ‘left out of things’, feeling ‘out of place’ or ‘lonely’ are similar to the respective OECD averages²⁴.

In general, it is widely accepted that the lower the educational level of a person is the higher the at-risk-of poverty rate appears to be and vice versa. Moreover, the educational attainment of poor children is inferior to other children’s²⁵, while children living in poor households are more likely to ‘drop out’ than children living in affluent households. In 2003, the drop out rates from the compulsory nine year education for children up to 17 years old was 1.64 % for poor children and 0.15 % for children living in non-poor households²⁶. According to the EU SILC 2003 data for Greece, it was found that the drop out rate for poor children was much higher than that of the non-poor children.²⁷ However, the bulk of school drop outs is unequally distributed across Greece, with rural areas²⁸ and certain regions (Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Ionian Islands and Crete)²⁹ presenting drop out rates higher than the national average. Such a finding indicates the need for territorial distribution of interventions aimed at the lowering of school drop outs rates, which is missing in the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008.

²³ EC, 2006a, p. 108.

²⁴ Data for 2003 extracted from: UNICEF, (2007), p.43.

²⁵ Chrysakis M. Balourdos D., 2005, Table 4, p. 74.

²⁶ N. Bouzas, 2005, Table 5, p. 103.

²⁷ Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, 2006, p. 13.

²⁸ Kanellopoulos C., et al, 2004.

²⁹ Palaiokrasas et al.

At this point, however, it should be pointed out that counselling services at school or in the community are virtually non-existent in Greece and that needs are addressed only erratically and with considerable delay. Children have no one to turn to for advice and support, whilst parents are usually reluctant to seek advice and also face the practical problem of a lack of appropriate agents and services.

Furthermore, poor children aged 12-17 years are often forced to be engaged in employment to a greater extent than the non-poor children (7.0 % compared with 2.2 %, according to 2003 figures)³⁰. From the 11 000 unemployed children aged 12-17 years, 24 % come from poor households, while the rest live in non-poor households. Perhaps these children have the chance to wait until finding a better job. As the Amnesty International-Greek Section argues “child labour does exist in Greece. But it is very hard even to estimate how many child labourers exist, since in Greece — as in the rest of Europe — child labour is not open to the public eye”. Poverty is obviously at the core of child labour in Greece, as in so many other countries. Usually, the families of these children are too poor to afford not to send their children out to work. It was estimated that in 2000, there were 5 800 street children between the ages of 2 and 15 in Greece, well known as the ‘traffic light kids’. These youngsters — dressed in shabby clothing — clean car windows or sell tissues and flowers for spare change at busy intersections, restaurants, coffee-shops and public spaces. The vast majority of these children are Greek gypsies, Albanians, Greeks and Greek Muslims³¹.

In any case, early engagement in the labour market and particularly in employment ought to fulfil the legal prerequisites regarding child labour and the special safety measures needed in order to avoid child injuries at the work-place. Moreover, unless the principle of equal opportunities is fully applied, poor children will continue to start their adult lives possessing fewer typical qualifications and threatened by higher poverty rates than other children.

The latter is confirmed by the EU-SILC 2003 data, which reveals a very impressive relationship between the level of education and poverty. The poverty rate in the ‘lower level of education’ group is more than 30 %, compared to an almost 16 % poverty rate in the ‘intermediate level of education’ group, and a mere 1 % poverty rate in the ‘higher level of education’ group.

Beyond the statistics, however, lie two more important issues relevant to the relationship between poverty and educational attainment. First, education seems to be a ‘reproductive’ factor, meaning that a low level of education of parents is translated into a higher risk for a low level of education in children. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is that children of impoverished parents are at a much higher risk of ‘falling through the cracks’ (leaving school, dropping out) of the educational system and at an even much higher risk of never returning to school to complete basic education or to learn a trade or skill. These factors are key determinants of falling into poverty.

1.6 Access to health and social services

It is widely acknowledged that poor persons across all age groups and all educational levels self-evaluate their health status as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’, or report a severe illness more often than non-poor persons. They also complain that they do not visit private doctors or dentist, because they cannot afford the costs³².

³⁰ Ibid, Table 6, p. 104.

³¹ For more details, see Amnesty International – Greek Section, 2002.

³² Chrysakis M., et al, 2005, p.129-130.

In addition, Greece displays higher infant mortality rates, higher 'low weight' birth rates and lower immunisation rates than the respective OECD averages, indicating a less effective healthcare system either in terms of provision of health preventive services to children or curative services during child-birth. On the other hand, the death rate from accidents and injuries per 100 000 persons under 19 years old is lower in Greece than the respective OECD average (13.5 % against 14.3 %) ³³. Greek children score lower percentages in reporting 'fair or bad' health in comparison to OECD average, which may be attributed to the fact that they are less exposed to risk behaviour (e.g. smoking cigarettes, drinking too much, etc.) and seem generally to take better care of their health, except in the case of eating breakfast and being overweight ³⁴.

As far as the use of social services is concerned, it is apparent that poor people in Greece present much higher take-up rates in the use of public social protection services in comparison to non-poor people: in 2003, the take-up rates for households with dependent children were 56 % and 12 % respectively. Likewise, poor people with dependent children use supportive services for disabled persons more often than non-poor people (in 2003, 1.73 % against 1.28 %). On the other hand, non-poor households present higher rates in the use of childcare facilities than poor households: in 2003, the respective rates were 12.3 % against 8.1 % ³⁵.

Overall, it may be said that health and social services in Greece and, in particular, social welfare and child protection services are still not adequately developed. Even today, there are still many geographical areas which are not covered by any health service or social service agencies. Needless to say, there is an acute 'welfare deficit' in terms of the services provided to children and families in difficulty in these areas.

2. Description and assessment of the overall framework for coordinating and developing policies – Identification and assessment of the main policies in place to both prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion and to promote the wellbeing of children in Greece.

2.1 The policy framework – the main policy measures

It is well known that EU Member States have decided to combat social exclusion through a common framework of policy priorities. These policy priorities contain the eradication of child poverty as a strategic objective ³⁶. At the EU level, "the main policy objectives in all EU Member States are common: the improvement of the economic situation of households and the protection against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the prevention of transmitting them to new generations" ³⁷. These objectives lead to the introduction of three policy types: First, policies aimed at the increase of a household's financial resources through either the increase of employment rates for certain population groups, or the

³³ UNICEF, 2007, pp. 42-43.

³⁴ Details in: UNICEF, 2007, pp. 44-45

³⁵ All the above mentioned data have been extracted from: Maratou -Alipranti L., 2005, Table 7, p. 247.

³⁶ Policy priorities for combating social exclusion in EU member states range from raising employment rates to the combating of every type of discrimination: EC, 2005, p.13.

³⁷ The results of a study concerning the transition of poverty to new generation in G. Britain show that there is a strong correlation between the poverty of parents and the poverty of children. Children who grow up in poor households exhibit high probability to be poor as adults: Sigle-Rushton W., 2004.

provision of financial transfers to households in need; secondly, policies aimed at the decrease of burdens for households stemming from the existence of children (e.g. housing policies, health provisions, etc.); and thirdly, policies aimed at securing children's protection and promoting their wellbeing (e.g. education to all children, irrespective of their socio-economic background or health status, etc.)³⁸.

The social policy system of Greece has much in common with the general Southern European social systems model³⁹. The provisions and contributions of these systems are strictly connected with the employment situation of each person. In this framework, family is the main protection provider for their vulnerable members, while the interventions of public social policy could be characterised as insignificant and restricted to the provision of certain services and modest financial transfers to certain population groups.

Greece, to date, has not elaborated and implemented a comprehensive long-term strategy, policy or programme aimed at the eradication of adult or child poverty. Child poverty in Greece has not yet been a key priority for social policy and, thus, there are neither any specific strategies nor any specific policies to combat child poverty and social exclusion. This is indirectly confirmed by the Greek government's answer to the EC Task Force's Questionnaire on existing tools to monitor child poverty and social exclusion, which states, among other things, that "combating child poverty and social inclusion is mainly served through interventions, which fall under two out of the four policy priorities of the Greek National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAPincl)."⁴⁰

More specifically, a range of interventions relating to children's wellbeing are included under the following policy priorities:

- A) Dealing with the disadvantaged position of individuals and groups in education and training; and
- B) Providing support to the family.

However, apart from the above no reference is made in the Greek response to the EC Task Force's Questionnaire to the existence of a specific strategy or specific policies aiming at the eradication of child poverty in Greece. Neither is any indication given as to whether the various measures relating to children and their families constitute part of a wider strategy or policy.

In general, it may be said that the policy measures included under the abovementioned priorities are mainly geared towards labour market activation rather than improving children's wellbeing. This point is particularly highlighted by the Eurochild Report (2007). As this Report fairly points out, "the issue of children can be found as future workers or within the family context. Children are highlighted only in the issue of domestic violence and disability. As for social inclusion of the vulnerable groups, there are few actions for children and youth. Moreover, those existing actions lack clear measures"⁴¹.

Overall, the policy measures relating to children in the Greek NAPincl 2006-2008, share three main common characteristics:

- They are not focused on poor children. It is therefore not known whether poor children are being addressed by these measures. For example, there is a lack of knowledge as regards the number and the extent to which poor children participate in supplementary teaching programmes and in extra teaching support courses.

³⁸ EC, 2005a, p. 3.

³⁹ For a detailed presentation of the various types of social policy systems see Hoelscher, P., 2004, pp. 51- 55.

⁴⁰ It refers to the Social Inclusion strand of the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008.

⁴¹ Eurochild Report 2007, p. 52.

- None of these measures have been properly evaluated, so there is a lack of knowledge of their impact on the socioeconomic situation of poor children.

- The vast majority of these measures/ programmes are not accompanied by quantitative targets, so it is not possible to monitor progress and their future possible success.

As far as the first policy priority is concerned, no specific targets are set in order to increase enrolment rates of children coming from vulnerable groups. Moreover, the policy measures mentioned (e.g. supplementary teaching programmes, extra teaching support, reinforcement of certification actions, etc.), which aim at ensuring access to qualitative education with an emphasis on secondary education and on vocational training, are free choice devices and not targeted towards pupils with low grades or disadvantaged social backgrounds. In this respect, their impact on pupils' attainment has to be verified.

With regard to the second policy priority, the interventions planned aim at reinforcing and supporting the family, including measures and programmes ranging from support to the family, mainly through employment actions, to the provision of information and awareness raising campaigns. As a rule, however, these interventions are not targeted exclusively towards poor persons with children. Their impact on child poverty may therefore occur by chance and not as a planned objective.

In recent years, there has undoubtedly been an increase in the range of services provided to children and families, irrespective of whether they are poor or not. These services are offered both by public and private non-profit institutions, which have been on the increase over recent years, though they often overlap. However, empirical findings indicate that many families, particularly those in great difficulty, are usually unaware or partly aware of the range of services provided⁴². It therefore follows that, in case of a problem, families that can afford it may have recourse to expensive private services, whereas those that do not often do nothing to address their problems.

The direct improvement of the economic situation of households in need is mainly based on interventions classified under the axis: 'provision of income support'. These have been relied upon for the establishment of various allowances for certain socio-economic groups and tax payment reductions in accordance to the number of children of the households which submit tax declarations⁴³. However, the ever limited childcare services impinge upon household's successful participation in the labour market. As poor households themselves advocate on various occasions, the provision of financial transfers ought to be supplementary to the social policy services for vulnerable/dependent household members⁴⁴. In other words, it is widely accepted that multidimensional problems such as poverty and social exclusion can only be met by a range of interventions and not by a single dimensional policy approach.

Overall, it may be said that there is a lack of close interaction and synergy between the various social policy related measures and actions. As a result, they are short of constituting an integrated policy response to the problems of poverty and social exclusion, let alone to the specific problems of child poverty.

Furthermore, it should be underlined that no general system of social assistance, minimum income or 'safety net' schemes have thus far been in force in Greece. Instead, there exist a series of very low cash benefits and a number of benefits in kind for different social groups, including families and children facing economic hardship. There are around 36 benefits or allowances, which aim to cover either certain

⁴² Mouriki A., Michailidou M., Gazon E., 2007.

⁴³ A detailed description of various allowances in favor of families with children in Greece can be found in: MISSOC, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/missoc2002/index_chapitre9_en.htm

⁴⁴ This is one of the results of a field research of poor households living in deprived urban areas of Athens conducted in 2005 within the project: Learning from Families: Chajivarnava E., Chandanos G., 2005, p.31.

population groups (e.g. unprotected children, the elderly, large families with many children, etc.) or certain circumstances (e.g. unemployment, maternity, etc.)⁴⁵, without a plausible connection or combination with labour market active policies.

In 2000, Greece spent only 1 % of its total GDP on direct financial transfers⁴⁶, while the respective average for the EU-15 was 1.4 %⁴⁷. In addition, family/child allowances/benefits constituted 51.5 % of direct financial transfers in Greece, while the respective average for the EU-15 was 67.2 %⁴⁸. Greece's expenditure, as a share of its GDP, for the financial support of households in need is lower than the respective EU-15 average. This trend can be explained by both the small number of households on benefit and the low rate of allowances/benefits. For example, in 2001, from 62 000 single parent households (2 % of the total number of households⁴⁹ or 4 % of all households with children⁵⁰), only 225 households were receiving single parent benefit⁵¹. And this, despite the fact that they are amongst the most vulnerable population groups in Greece, exhibiting very high poverty rates (42.2 % for single parent families with children less than 17 years old)⁵².

Undoubtedly, all the abovementioned allowances and benefits do not constitute a guaranteed minimum income scheme, which is still long overdue in Greece. Moreover, these can not act as kinds of minimum income schemes, given that they are not designed to increase the income of beneficiaries beyond a certain income threshold (e.g. income poverty line), but function mainly to supplement income by an additional modest amount. Besides this, it should be noted that Greece, thus far, has not adopted an official 'poverty line'. However, given the lack of hard evidence and impact indicators, no assessment can be made as to whether differentials have been narrowed by income transfers, or whether greater equality of access to resources and opportunities has been achieved. Nevertheless, a study compiling an assessment of the impact of financial transfers to households for the decrease of child poverty in Southern European countries reveals that these transfers are very ineffective given that "a great number of poor households with children are not eligible for income support (as in Greece and Italy) or receive low benefits (as in Spain and Portugal)"⁵³.

Following on from the above, it becomes apparent that in Greece the existing distributive and particularly re-distributive policies in favour of individuals or households with children are short of being effective mechanisms to eradicate child poverty. Serious questions are therefore raised in relation to their ability to break the intra-generational transmission of poverty. Given the serious consequences that poverty has on present and future lives of those children living in poor households, the issues relating to intra-generational poverty links need urgently to be addressed both scientifically and politically.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2003, Statistical Annex.

⁴⁶ Such direct money transfers are: Childbirth allowance, parental leave, family benefits/child benefits and other family benefits: unprotected child benefit, benefit for single parent families with child/children, benefit for families with children with disabilities, etc.

⁴⁷ Abramovici G., 2003, Table 1, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Abramovici G., 2003, Table 1, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Lehman P., Wirtz Ch., 2004.

⁵⁰ Kikikias H. et al, 2007, Table 2, p. 10.

⁵¹ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2003.

⁵² Matsaganis M., et al, 2004, Table 1, p. 22.

⁵³ Matsaganis M., et al, 2004, p. 16.

2.2 Violence against children

In Greece, corporal punishment and generally violence of/against children is prohibited by laws both at school and in the home ⁵⁴. However, the results of a study conducted in 1997 ⁵⁵, showed that 65.5 % of parents use physical punishment, and that younger children (first graders) are three times more likely to be punished compared to older children (sixth graders). Moreover, children with siblings are physically punished twice as often as lone children. In 6 % of cases, spanking led to physical injury, while 1.8 % were injured severely enough to need medical treatment or hospitalisation. It should be noted that 90 % of parents believe that physical punishment negatively affects parent-child relations and also has severe effects on the child.

At a comparative level with OECD countries, Greek youngsters seem to experience more violence in terms of physical fighting and less violence in terms of bullying ⁵⁶.

As regards sexual abuse of children, it is difficult to find relevant statistical data, due to the fact “that sexual abuse is still a social taboo, with the majority of cases in hiding. The systematic recording of cases brought to social/legal services, would only reveal a portion of the extent of ‘the best kept secret’ in today’s society” ⁵⁷. In 1997, 1 600 minors were sexually abused in Greece: 90 % of these minors aged 15-18 were female. 400 children aged 12-14 were offered to paedophiles, 75 % of whom were Albanian boys ⁵⁸.

According to Amnesty International’s Greek Section “there is a serious evidence and police data on the trafficking, sale and abduction of children from neighboring countries, particularly Albania, for the purposes of exploitation of all types, including sexual exploitation. Trafficking of women and girls for prostitution in Greece has increased sharply in recent years. A survey, carried out from September 1995 to March 1997 in Athens, revealed the presence of around 3 000 children and young persons involved in prostitution and the forced provision of sexual services”.

In any case, the initiatives taken by the State regarding domestic violence, such as the issue of a recent law on the prohibition of domestic violence, the creation of a network for the prevention and prohibition of corporal punishment of children, and legal framework against trafficking, as well as the establishment of a Children’s Rights Ombudsman, are expected to have a positive impact on alleviating violence against children.

As far as the Greek Ombudsman is concerned, it should be pointed out that it is a constitutionally established Independent Authority. It was founded in October 1998 and operates under the provisions of Law 3094/2003. The mission of the Greek Ombudsman is to mediate between the public sector and individuals, in order to protect the citizens’ rights and ensure the public sector compliance with the rule of law.

In addition, the Ombudsman is concerned with the protection and promotion of children's rights. This mission has been undertaken by the Department of Children's Rights, which began operations in July 2003.

⁵⁴ Law 3500/06: Official Gazette No 232/24 Oct. 2006.

⁵⁵ Fereti E.

⁵⁶ UNISEF, 2007, p. 44.

⁵⁷ Amnesty International-Greek Section, 2002.

⁵⁸ Data extracted from: <http://www.stopchildtrafficking.org/site/uploads/mesia/english/EU.pdf>

In this context, the Department:

- Mediates in specific cases in which a child's rights are being violated, following a complaint filed by a citizen, aiming at the protection of the child and at the restitution of his/her rights. If necessary, in cases of serious violations, the Ombudsman acts on its own initiative.
- Undertakes initiatives in order to monitor and promote the implementation of international conventions and of the national legislation on children's rights, to inform the public, to exchange views with representatives of other institutions and to elaborate and submit proposals to the Government.

During the first two years of its operations, the Department of Children's Rights examined more than 300 cases. The majority of these cases (43 %) concerned various education issues, while the rest concerned issues regarding kindergardens (16 %), family matters (10 %), juvenile immigrants (10 %), abuse and exploitation (7 %) etc. ⁵⁹

2.3 Family and peer relations

Under a policy priority which includes interventions aiming at reinforcing and supporting the family, a wide range of measures are under consideration aimed at the reconciliation of family and professional life. These entail, among other things, schemes such as job-protected parental leave - extended to fathers - paid leave, working hours flexibility, etc. However, according to UNICEF data, the percentage of students whose parents spend time just talking to them several times per week (58.1 %) is lower than the respective average of OECD countries (62.8 %). Greek young people also exhibit less contact in their relations with friends ⁶⁰. Therefore, with regard to the policy measures in favour of strengthening the reconciliation of family and professional life, it seems that much remains to be done in order to increase parents' free time.

3. Description and assessment of the arrangements in place in Greece for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion amongst children and to promote the wellbeing of children

The Greek response to the questionnaire from the EC Task Force on child poverty and wellbeing concerning the arrangements in place for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion amongst children, and to promote their wellbeing, states clearly that:

- a) "Evaluation policies are made by the competent Ministries and Bodies at central government level, based on available administrative data or, more rarely, on empirical studies and statistical surveys".
- b) "The overall assessment of the effectiveness of the strategy is an ad-hoc procedure conducted at inter-ministerial level during the preparation of the NAPincl".

⁵⁹ <http://www.synigoros.gr/0-18/gr/children>

⁶⁰ UNICEF, 2007, p. 44.

- c) "At present, no body is in charge of centralising the monitoring and related information"
- d) "As for the impact assessment of policies on the expected social outcomes, no standardised mechanism has yet been established concerning the links among the policy objectives/priorities, indicators and the actual policy measures".

There is no doubt that the inexistence of a coherent and integrated policy on the alleviation of child poverty and social exclusion amongst children in Greece is linked, among other things, to the lack of a unique monitoring and impact assessment system. Evaluation procedures and the assessment of the effectiveness of policy priorities A and B, mentioned in Section 2.1, are made at Ministerial level based upon administrative data mainly concerning the financial absorption of the various interventions budgets. Such a practice is certainly a long way from constituting a reliable evaluation and impact assessment mechanism. It therefore becomes evident that the vast majority of axes and measures of the policy priorities A and B have not been evaluated at all, let alone in the context of the alleviation of child poverty. As a result, it is not possible to assess their impact on child poverty developments and trends. In other words, it is not known how, to what extent, and to which directions all the abovementioned policies contribute to the fight against child poverty and social exclusion and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of children.

In addition, it should be emphasised once more that research on the issues of poverty, social exclusion and social inequalities has never been given a high priority by the State, and neither has its results been taken on board in the social policy development process in Greece. As a result, informational gaps concerning the causes of poverty and social exclusion, the mechanisms that produce and reproduce poverty, the actual groups and subgroups who are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion etc., continue to persist. It is therefore of utmost importance to gain a better knowledge about all these issues. This, in turn, would allow effective policy approaches to be developed for the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in Greece. To this end, further commissioned research is needed and better links established between research outputs and the formulation of social policy responses.

4. Concluding remarks

Undoubtedly, policy efforts to combat child poverty and social exclusion in Greece are reflected in a range of measures which are being implemented in various fields such as: employment, education, social protection and care, etc. However, child poverty in Greece remains at a high level. Despite the implementation of measures relating to the wellbeing of children, there is no evidence that these measures are underpinned by a mainstreaming approach, let alone by a comprehensive policy and strategy. Most of these measures remain partial and do not pervade all areas - or levels - of policy making in these fields. In addition, they appear fragmented and thus are lacking synergy and close interaction between themselves. In other words, it appears that promoting social inclusion, and in particular promoting the wellbeing of children, has not as yet become a cross-Government priority in Greece, let alone a key priority in Greek contemporary social policy.

The abovementioned weaknesses, in turn, are related to the fact that there are no any permanent institutional arrangements in Greece for the coordination and mainstreaming of social inclusion policies and, in particular, policies concerning the wellbeing of children. Neither are there any arrangements for articulating the priorities set at national level through the actions of Regional or Local Authorities. In this respect, appropriate coordinating mechanisms or structures are therefore urgently needed to ensure that the needs of children are mainstreamed across all relevant policy areas. The need for a systematic analysis and continuous monitoring of the changes taking place in this policy area should also be given high priority for action.

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