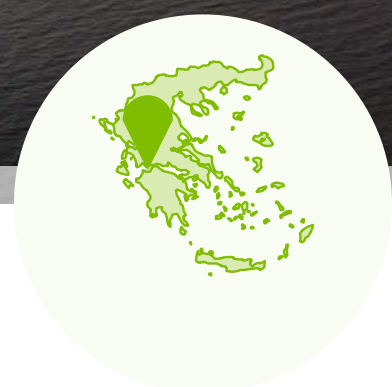




Achacia Rio Bridge



Greece, The Western Greece Region

General overview

The Western Greece Region (WGR) encompasses the northwestern area of the Peloponnese and the western section of Central Greece. It is connected to the capital city, Athens, and the rest of Greece through an extensive network of motorways. The port of the city of Patras serves as the main gateway for shipping to Italy. Spanning an area of 11 336 km², the WGR is the sixth largest region in Greece with a population of 648 220 – 6.1% of the national total. The terrain is diverse, comprising mountains (45.3%), semi-mountainous regions (25.6%), and lowlands (29.1%). The Region is rich in natural resources, and includes mountains, rivers, lakes and protected Natura sites. It is also distinguished by an impressive coastline and beautiful seas that offer unique recreation and wellness opportunities (1,2).

With a birth rate of 7.63 births per 1000 inhabitants, the population distribution is as follows: 21% under 20 years of age; 53% between 20 and 60 years; and 24% over 60 years. In 2020, life expectancy at birth was 79 years for men and 84 years for women. The presence of young foreign residents, who make up 5%–10% of the population, partly offsets the region's ageing trend. The gross domestic product per capita is €14 700 (1,3).

In the WGR, health care is provided by the local and central health authorities across all Regional Units. The health-care network consists of three tertiary hospitals and five secondary hospitals providing medical care, as well as 29 primary health centres. In addition, numerous active patient associations promote health and well-being. The

health system covers long-term care, home care, mental-health services, palliative care and public health centres (4,5).

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

In Greece, the health system includes the National Health System (NHS) and private structures. The NHS manages health-insurance coverage and provides services through hospitals, health centres and local health units. At the same time, the private sector offers services through private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres. Access to health care is provided to both insured and uninsured citizens through the NHS. Citizens in Greece have the right to free access to public health-care facilities, such as hospitals, health centres, mental-health units and rehabilitation centres. The services provided include hospitalization, diagnostic procedures, surgical procedures, vaccinations and dental care, all at no cost.

The WGR has a comprehensive UHC strategy, aligned with Greece's national plan for promoting health equity and accessibility to health-care services. The strategy focuses on strengthening primary health care, modernizing infrastructure, supporting vulnerable social groups and leveraging digital technologies. Through partnerships with regional and national health structures, it ensures the provision of effective and modern health services. With targeted interventions and appropriate funding, it aims to reduce inequalities and improve public health, significantly contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strengthening the public health system.

Amid challenges related to climate change, the Greek health-care system recognizes the impact of environmental and social factors on its services, and the need to address the SDGs. The objectives of the country towards sustainable development make it possible for Greek hospitals and the health-care system to adapt to climate change and promote social value, social equity and environmental health. Sustainable health-care management, overseen by the Ministry of Health of Greece, is essential to ensuring the sustainability of the system.

The WGR places significant importance on achieving the SDGs related to social responsibility, environmental management and governance as the main part of its social-policy strategy. Empirical data both in the Greek health-care system and that of the WGR show improvements in addressing environmental and social concerns. Although the WGR has made progress towards achieving four of the SDGs (nos 2, 5, 7 and 15), it is encountering significant challenges in achieving seven of them (nos 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 15). Over 42% of the Region's residents are in severe danger of poverty or social exclusion, while close to 26% of its urban dwellers are experiencing serious material deprivation (6). Recently, the Region has implemented new holistic strategies, addressing environmental and social concerns in alignment with

national and international policies. The latter include the 2030 Agenda (SDGs), the European Programme of Work and national policy related to Greece's sustainable health-care system. The aim is to enhance economic outcomes and social equity for local communities and stakeholders (7).



Promoting health and well-being

The WGR works with the Government of Greece, regional municipalities, health sectors, universities, foundations, voluntary organizations, patient associations and business representatives to promote health and equity across the WRG. A flagship initiative of the WGR is the Annual Regional Health and Well-being Plan, "Health and Society for All 2024". This plan is aligned with the EU Health Equity Strategy, the UN Leave No One Behind Strategy, relevant WHO guidance (for example, the San Marino Statement on ensuring no one is left behind (2019), the WHO physical activity factsheet — Greece 2024, and the WHO health equity policy tool) and the European Pillar of Social Rights. It includes a range of health-education and health-promotion efforts, such as the provision of support to the National Immunization Programme, especially with respect to vulnerable groups, and the organization of seminars on cancer prevention, organ donation and substance abuse. The WGR also extends health-care services to remote areas through mobile health units, ensuring check-ups for at-risk populations and assistance for people with physical or mental disabilities. Another focus is on improving access to health care for all, regardless of economic status, health status, or location. The WGR has successfully implemented the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)/European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programme through health-equity initiatives that support FEAD recipients. This endeavour involves working with social scientists and health professionals to provide psychological support and health-care interventions in homes or communities. In addition, the WGR supports family-centred activities and connects vulnerable children and adults with critical services, thus further advancing health equity and prosperity across the WRG (8,9).



Protecting against health emergencies

In the WGR, protecting public health during emergencies, including earthquakes, floods, epidemics, and natural disasters, is a top priority. The WGR leads the Institutional Coordinating Team for Civil Protection in all three Regional Units of the WGR (Achaia, Aitolokarnania and Ilia), working with entities, such as municipalities, the Police, the Fire Directorate and the Military Red Cross. A specific emergency-preparedness strategy is in place that is in line with national and EU laws. The General Directorate of Public Health and Social Welfare of the WGR is responsible for distributing information on preventive hygiene, assessing water quality and implementing anti-mosquito measures. The WGR also proposes regional health initiatives and collaborates with health-care facilities to combat epidemic diseases. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the WGR followed national, European and WHO guidance (such as, the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan) and actively engaged in various initiatives. The Region distributed personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, antiseptics, etc.) to vulnerable populations, including health-care workers, volunteers, community-health volunteers and sanitation workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, information was shared with the public via the support line, "We strengthen together", and an innovative platform (10) provided integrated training. The project was presented as good practice in other EU countries and published in the FEAD ESF+ Catalogue 2021 of the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Diverse approaches to supporting Europe's most deprived. FEAD case studies 2021* (10).

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

The WGR prioritizes mental health for all by combating stigma, improving access to treatment and enhancing mental-health services. The Region collaborates closely with mental-health associations and, in 2023, designed and implemented the “Health at home” project, which provided support to 400 FEAD/ESF+ beneficiaries (those most

deprived) through psychosocial interventions at home and in the community. This support included psychological assessment, counselling, the evaluation of cognitive skills, advisory services for older people and their caregivers, advice on stress management, and referrals for individuals with disabilities.

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

The WGR has a strong interest in utilizing effective digital tools to improve communication between the population and the health-care services. These tools include eHealth, mHealth services, and innovative approaches to public health decision-making. “Life Click”, an initiative launched by the WGR in May 2022, provides independent-living and safe-ageing services to approximately 1000 older people. It offers personalized care, enhancing safety and reducing loneliness through a 24-hour monitoring and support service.

With a view to incorporating behavioural and cultural insights, the WGR runs prevention projects among minority groups (for example, the Roma population, refugees and migrants). Moreover, during 2023, within the context of EU family policy and the European Child Guarantee initiative, the WGR conducted educational/cultural excursions for the most deprived families in the Region (11–13).

Initiative specific to WGR

In 2020–2021, over 500 children from the most deprived families in the WGR participated in a physical-activity project, involving 72 sports clubs and academies. The aim of the project was to cultivate a positive attitude towards physical activity, counter the effects of poverty and promote social inclusion among children of 6–12 years of age.

This successful sports programme was recognized as good practice in the FEAD Network case study catalogue (14).

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. the health and well being of the citizens of the WGR, and achievement of the SDGs
2. the European Pillar of Social Rights and related future steps
3. digital tools for health — preparedness for and response to health risks.

Main partners and collaborators

These are:

- The 6th Health Region of Peloponnese, Ionian Islands, Epirus and Western Greece
- The University of Patras
- The Centre to Advance Public Awareness and Recruitment of Bone Marrow Donor Volunteers (CBMDP) — “Save a Life”, University of Patras
- The Medical Association of Patras
- The Regional Federation of Persons with Disabilities of Western Greece and Southern Ionian Islands
- The EU Community of Practice on Material Support of the European Social Fund Plus
- The Greek Managing Authority of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
- The European Science Foundation
- The Organization of Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity
- Prevention Center for Addictions and Promotion of Psychosocial Health of the Regional Unit of Achaia “kallipolis”.

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