

## “Care2Work” Project



Report on Young Carers from Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Minorities in Greece

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## 1. Key objective of the report

The present executive summary comprises the main findings of the Report on young carers from ethnic groups and ethnic minorities in Greece, which is written in the Greek language. This national research report is part of the transnational research study which is carried out in Greece, in Italy, in Sweden and in the U.K., in the frame of the EU funded project titled “Care2Work”, under the Erasmus+ Programme; the project tackles with one of the most marginalised communities of Europe, that of the young carers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, with a view to break the cycle of poverty and multiple disadvantage that they face. The Greek report describes the key characteristics of the young family carers in Greece, i.e. those people who take care of their family members, who belong to ethnic groups and ethnic minorities, as well as their needs and the barriers they face in their access to employment, education and training.

## 2. Methodology

The findings of the national report resulted from qualitative research conducted from September to October 2015, using the following two methods:

- a) Desk research: for the collection of the secondary data, a literature review on the topic was conducted, focusing on resources mainly from the Greek bibliography and secondarily from the international bibliography.
- b) Field research: in order to further explore the needs and the barriers of the young carers of the target group in Greece, 9 face to face interviews have been made; in particular, we conducted 4 interviews with young carers, two of them come from African countries (Nigeria and Sierra Leone), one of them comes from Bulgaria and the last one is Greek who belongs to the Muslim minority. We also interviewed 5 experts and professionals who provided us with important data and information about the topic.

## 3. Key findings from the literature review

1. Issues of definition: According to the review of the Greek literature, the concept of “carer”, in particular that of “informal carer” or “unpaid carer” is associated with the term of “family caregiver” or “family carer” (Triantafillou and Mestheneos, 1993). It refers to those people who provide care or assistance to other family members. The



carers are usually spouses, children, brothers and sisters or in some cases friends, neighbors, relatives or volunteers (Ioannidou, Koulouri & Spiriaki, 2009, as cited in Kourasi et al., 2013).

2. Reasons for becoming a carer: In Greece, it is very common for family members to undertake the role of the carer for a number of reasons. First of all, there is the perception that the provision of care is a duty for the Greek families and a feature of the Greek tradition (Tsirmigka, 2013). Then, the assistance and support provided by the State is very limited, something which is related to the shrinkage of the so-called welfare state as a consequence of the economic crisis, according to Ntalaka (2014). In addition, the economic crisis in Greece has resulted in the increase of the number of the people who take care of their family members (“Take Care” Project, 2014).

3. Demographic features of the carers: In Greece, spouses and children are the family members who undertake the care of persons in need (Triantafillou and Mestheneos, 1993). According to the Triantafillou et al. (2006) study, the average age of carers in the Greek family is 51.7 years. Half of family carers are still working a mean of 40 hours/week. As for their educational level, 37.4% have a low level of education, 40.6% have an intermediate level and 22.1% have a high level of education. As regards the gender of the carers, women traditionally are those who dominate.

4. Needs of carers: Undoubtedly, the work that the family carers offer is very important, taking into account that they have under their protection people who cannot cope with all daily functions; at the same time, the carers, often, have to suppress their own emotional, social and economic needs. According to the literature review, the main needs of the carers are summarized as follows: need for psychological support, need for communication, need for financial support, need for education and information on the care of their family members in need.

5. Organisations and programmes which support the carers in Greece: The organisations and the programmes which support the carers in the provision of their services are limited in Greece and they usually focus on the care of elderly people. Some noteworthy initiatives are carried out by the Athens Association of Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders (<http://www.alzheimerathens.gr/index.php/en>) as well as by the “Nestor” Pchycogeriatric Association (<http://www.nstr.gr/en/>). In addition, there are a few initiatives which target the carers from ethnic groups or minorities, such as the “Dipylon” Intercultural Day Centre, operated by the NGO “Klimaka” (<http://www.klimaka.org.gr/διαπολιτισμικό-κέντρο-ημέρας-δυπυλ/>), which supports persons from the Muslim minority as well as the “Babel” Day Centre (<http://syn-eirnos.gr/babel/>) which supports the migrants.

6. Young carers in Greece who belong to ethnic groups and ethnic minorities: The one and only officially recognized minority in Greece is the Muslim, which is located in Thrace, in Northern Greece and numbers about 114.000 people (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011). It consists of three ethnic groups, the Turks, the Pomaks and the Roma, each of them has its own traditions and language. In addition, the minority ethnic groups in Greece are consisted of the migrants, their majority of whom landed in Greece in the 1990s and the 2000s. Most of them come from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania and more recent immigrant groups include people from Africa and Asia. Based on that and given that the phenomenon of migration is recent in Greece, in comparison to other European countries, it is obvious that there are still no increasing needs for care especially to elderly people who are members of migrants' families. Besides, we have to take into account that the majority of migrants came to Greece without their parents and some of them have left their children in their counties. For these reasons, it was difficult to identify data from the Greek bibliography focusing on this particular target group.

#### **4. Key findings from the field research**

The field research conducted for the purposes of this study provides very important information about the young carers from ethnic groups and ethnic minorities. The key findings are presented below:

1. Demographic features of the young carers: their age ranges from 25 to 35 years. Most of them are women, who are exclusively dedicated to the care of their family members. They are either members of the Greek Muslim minority or economic migrants coming from Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia and African countries. Many of the young migrants were born in Greece, as their parents came to the country in the 1990s and there are some migrants who came to Greece in the 2000s. Most of the women carers are married, especially those belonging to the Muslim minority, where it is customary to get married at a young age. As for their educational level few of them have graduated from schools of secondary or higher education, particularly those coming from the Balkan countries. Most of the young carers are totally unskilled and primary school graduates, mostly those from African countries and the carers of the Muslim minority. As regards their employment status, most of them are unemployed and face many difficulties in finding a job, because of the economic crisis as well as of their low or insufficient specialisation.

2. Reasons for becoming carers: The reasons they undertake the role of carers have to do with the financial difficulties their families face and with their inability to access

the welfare system something which is related to the fact that they cannot speak the Greek language. In addition, most of them believe that it is a moral obligation to take care of their family members in need.

3. Problems and obstacles faced by young carers: The young carers face many problems and obstacles as regards their role as carers. In particular, they do not have specific knowledge and have never been trained on how to take care of the people in need; even though they may wish to improve their competences as carers, they do not know where and how to find information. The fact that most of them do not know the Greek language is an additional problem. Moreover, many of them do not have the time or the mood to improve themselves as carers, because of the great psychological burden they bear and the frustration they feel. They never ask for psychological support, because it is not common to their culture and customs to ask this kind of support. Last, but not least, they face many financial problems, given that the care expenses are very high.

4. Problems and needs of young carers in terms of their age, their access to education and employment and as members of ethnic groups and ethnic minorities. The young carers live socially isolated both as members of ethnic groups or minorities and because of their role as carers. They have fewer possibilities for personal development and employability, although they share the same opportunities with rest young people in Greece. Their educational needs are large, mainly for those people who live away from urban centres, since most of them are primary education graduates and at the same time they are heavily affected by unemployment. Moreover, few are the young carers who know very well the Greek language, mainly those who were born in Greece. This definitely is a barrier to their access to employment and to any professional development. The problems are even stronger for the young carers who belong to the Muslim minority and reside in villages which are inhabited by people of the same religion and speakers of the same language. The educational level of this group is very low, as they usually drop out of elementary school and work in agricultural works. The frustration that the young carers feel and the lack of free time do not allow them to develop their skills or to search for a job which could improve their living standards as well as their professional perspective and their full integration into society. In general, the young carers are integrated into the Greek society, especially those who know the language and were born in Greece, and those from Balkan or European countries, since their culture and their religion is closer to these of Greek people. However, most of them complain that they have no time for personal and social life and cannot enjoy their life like other young people do.

5. Support services to young carers: As regards the support of the carers by the State, it was emphasized that the State is resoundingly absent. Some limited activities

implemented by NGOs funded through EU programmes are of course considerable but are not adequate to cover the increasing needs of the young carers in Greece.

6. Legal/ Policy framework: There is no legal or policy framework in Greece which focuses on the young carers of ethnic groups and minorities; this is associated to the general lack of specific policies in Greece that support family carers.

## 5. Next steps and key recommendations

As a conclusion, it is obvious that the young carers from ethnic groups and minorities in Greece face too many barriers, which are related to their role as carers as well as to their low educational level and their limited access to employment. Moreover, many of them are not in the position to improve their lives, because of the financial difficulties they and their families face but also due to the limited employment and education opportunities they could take advantage of. Besides, the fact that they are members of specific ethnic groups and minorities seems to affect greatly the young carers, especially those who do not know the Greek language. Based on the above mentioned issues and taking into account the objectives of the “Care2Work” project, a series of policy proposals and activities targeting this particular group of young people is considered more than important. Some key recommendations include the following:

- Organisation of supporting educational and counselling/ employment programmes.
- Actions for the utilisation of the skills and competences that the young people have acquired as carers.
- Organisation of Greek language courses
- Information about the supporting programmes and creation of informative materials in the languages of the young carers.
- Networking and cooperation among stakeholders, organisations and relevant actors who could support these groups.
- Financial support to the carers’ families in great need.
- Organisation of activities and social events which could improve their social integration.

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