

The Timeless Role of Volunteering in the Protection of Socially Excluded Children and Young People: The Paradoxes of Food Insecurity in Greece, the Food Bank and the “Ark of the World”

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Summary

The great social crisis taking place, over the last decade, in Europe and of course in Greece, has brought great social changes at its treatment. In January 2014, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) began its operation, fact which constituted a symbol of European solidarity. This paper explores the issue of tackling the humanitarian crisis in our country by focusing on two institutions that existed before its outbreak (the private non-profit Food Bank and the Ark of the World, which are active within the scope of FEAD). Half of the food distributed in Europe comes from this institution through the operation of food banks. In our country the only member of the Federation of Food Banks is this private food bank, which has its own distribution network, providing food outside the resources of the European Solidarity Network. At the same time, an important non-profit Foundation (Ark of the World) is reinforced by the food bank but does not receive public assistance (FEAD). The Network which supports the weaker and most vulnerable populations in Europe has many forms but the dominant ones are those of the Red Cross, the Ministry of the Church and the State, which operate with the institution of food banks and agricultural cooperatives. In our country there are notable absences of partnerships that have tragic consequences for our long-term unemployed fellow citizens and not only. Social solidarity helps to manage the social risks of poverty. The inability of operation of such a system is refracted in the daily routine of each city and is reflected in the daily press as delinquency. Poverty management is a key element of primary social control (prevention) and an obligation of the state. Police is an institution which acts as secondary social control (repres-

sion) but cannot be used in the place of the former otherwise social cohesion is at stake. We observe the effects of lawlessness every day.

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Social Policy and protection during the crisis

A social fact must be explained by the analysis of the social causes that have shaped it in order to bring responsible people and public opinion into knowledge about social reform and prevention policies. In the recent publication of the 'Social Portrait of Greece 2016-2017'¹, the failure of modernization of the Greek society is highlighted in the context of Social Europe. The detailed analysis of relevant indicators of the European Union substantiates that Greece is in an unprecedented social rather than economic crisis, as is customarily referred to and dealt officially by the financial-banking main circles that monopolize the relevant debates. Social problems such as youth unemployment and poverty, for example, have a great cost for treatment.

The social and political fragmentation found in institutions and practices has led to opposite effects, as it does not "modernized" social policies (education, training, health and labor services sector). For example, the much important service of "Help at Home" has not been able to get included in the basic services of Local Administration Organizations for 15 years^{2, 3, 4}. In addition, the predominant medical model of the health system is based on private relationships of exploitation of health needs rather than the social model of community health, which is based on prevention by promoting cohesion and prosperity. The establishment of the public interest is also based on the prevention of disease, which requires the counting in of social measures of occupational safety. Unemployment and mainly long-term unemployment has dramatic effects on health⁵. Extreme poverty and social exclusion, if not regulated effectively, may bring about negative reductions in the functioning of the so-called *primary social control*, which is based on the institutions of the family, education, the protection of children and of vulnerable social classes.

The downgrading of these mechanisms and their feeble functioning assign the main role to *secondary social control* institutions, *that is to those who express themselves with repression*. The constant social precariousness and downgrade of primary forms of social control effectuate a weakness to *the environment of social cohesion* and, of course, to social trust, the fields of operation of the civil society⁶. When unemployment reaches prohibitive rates,

i.e. more than 30%, then it's difficult to regulate the social danger brought about by poverty, resulting in the activation of the mechanisms of repression and the flight of the most skilled workers abroad⁷. Continuous operation of secondary social forms of control (repression) in the position and of primary social forms brings a lasting fluidity and lawlessness in society and the economy, fact which may prove troublesome for democratic governance. In such circumstances, a synergy of all social actors is required, with primary form that of public and non-profit (voluntary) bodies, in order to address those social cuts.

Lifelong learning is an important response to this crisis. In order to operate, it requires infrastructures that link education with professional rights and local skills needs. The platform of the National List of Professions, whereby occupations with their employment rights will be compatible (correspondence) with the world of work in a region constitute an answer to this problem. This kind of organization of professions and the matching of skills with job positions is feasible within a general organization of professions with technical criteria defined by the division of labor and the comparative advantages of a region, rather than clientist policies that affect the employment process and the funding of training³. The emergence of the importance and of the connection of human capital with the positions of specialized work is a key factor in the fight against social exclusion and social mobility in the current conditions of internationalization of knowledge and digitalization of work.

In the eurozone, work, social protection and health are part of the so called general interest and were part of the Lisbon Process (2000). The general interest is institutionally expressed through a single social platform for the operation of social cohesion, which is based on working skills. The importance of a single and undivided, in terms of organization, social policy, *which has the dual role of primary social control within the concept of transferring resources from this sphere*, projects its importance compared to our country, where there is a medley of regulations and bodies which do not cooperate with each other on the common social problem of poverty and social exclusion. The social problem of poverty and unemployment seems to be tackled by conflicting competences among the different actors who do not operate within the framework of a common organizational platform established on the basis of national policy

for employment. *At the same time, resources which have been cut off from social benefits are channeled into costly surveillance and repression.* In this way, neither development nor of course a plan for regional skills and the reproduction of needs of working conditions is promoted². Some social phenomena such as youth unemployment and child poverty, which are at extreme levels in our country, consist only but symptoms of this fragmentation of the social space, which has justified the partly excessive cuts in resources for social services, health and education, bringing about these dramatic Results⁴.

The operation of a system that will ensure a *minimum guaranteed income* for the protection of socially weak (mothers and children), while operating in the eurozone (except Italy, which only recently started to implement this measure), remains requested, as it is also the operation of an anti-poverty organization within the framework of the relevant European network.

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

In January 2014, the European Aid Fund for the most dispossessed (FEAD) was organized and constitutes a symbol of European solidarity (3.8 billion for 2014-2020). The European Federation of Food Banks represents about 260 food banks in 21 EU countries. Half of the food distributed in Europe comes from this institution, the remainder from the food industry (22%), the commercial stores (17%) and individuals (14%)⁹. In our country, the only member of the Federation is the food bank founded by the company AB Vasilopoulos, on 1979, which organized a distribution network for food catering Common-benefit Foundations and those in need, based mainly on private offers. The food bank remains cut off from the resources of the European Solidarity Network. At the same time an important non-profit foundation (Ark of the World) is reinforced by the food bank and has not as well been assisted by the European Foundation (FEAD), which operates through the Ministry of Labour and Municipalities. The network for the reinforcement of weak in Europe has many forms but the dominant one is that of the Red Cross, the Ministry of the Church and the State. These institutions cooperate with the institution of food banks which in turn cooperate directly with agricultural

cooperatives.

The problem of poverty and youth unemployment in Greece. This is a comprehensive sociological phenomenon, which involves the entirety of the social governance departments, namely health, the economy, education. In our case, we leave a respectable part of the vulnerable population (young, old, long-term unemployed, etc.), due to the weak organization of our social policies, without social care. The non-correlation of poverty with food safety also shows a paradox that is perhaps an additional result of this weakness.

Our country presents a great waste on food compared to the average of EU28 (5.1% versus 2.3%)¹¹. At the same time, food insecurity accompanied by hunger is measurable only in households with children⁹. The interesting factor is that food insecurity in Greece is not an outcome of a deficiency in the total food supply in our country, as shown by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, where Greece ranks 23rd among 206 countries, based on the total food supply per person¹⁰. This is obviously the case, because there's no existed necessary synergy, between the various services (environment, labor, tourism economy, finance, development), in the context of an organization of a circular economy (food is not composted, neither there is complete recycling with the corresponding cost of charges or the remaining are available), which would have incurred fines because of food waste. This environmental cost could be averted with food relocation towards those in need.

Food banks are a key measure of social support for the unemployed and poor, as they are the recipients of food surpluses from hotels, restaurants, rural businesses, etc. The fight against food waste could work alongside other Social Fund actions, such as the *poverty line and the guaranteed income*, giving the stigma of a genuine environmental policy.

The Food Aid Fund (FEAD) projects for Greece to receive about 281 million Euros for the period 2014-2020 (second ranked among 21 countries)¹⁰. The transfer of these resources would undoubtedly bring great relief to those affected by great poverty and unemployment. It is noteworthy, however, that between, 2014-2015, Greece was in the 19th place among the 21 countries with approved expenditure in FEAD's classification for resource absorption. The

form of operation of food aid in the EU has globally taken almost the form of Food Banks. The establishment of these Public Banks in our country has not yet moved forward in the form that operates in the rest of the EU. The operation of these banks in the EU provides a double economic and social benefit, allowing for agricultural cooperatives to dispose their products to those having a need in food. It is therefore legitimate in the context of the European social response to the humanitarian crisis to establish a corresponding institutional arrangement (Food Banks) in Greece. Such a regulation would bring financial relief to farmers and livestock farmers in our country, with the provision of their products towards the food need population. Moreover, while the operation of the third sector (non-profit) for the social economy was established with Law 4430/2016, in practice the requested establishment of the socio-economic function of Volunteerism and Self-help does find in agreement all institutions on the issue of the importance of the third sector in the functioning of the general interest. For-profit enterprises exert pressure, through the relevant ministry, which on the other hand does not realize the non-profit or moral economy of voluntary and general interest social cooperatives and of social entrepreneurship, resulting in a different than anticipated organization and financial response towards them.

The main pillars of the operation of Community solidarity are aimed at the governance of poverty and social exclusion in the Member States. The aforementioned demonstrate in practice the social policy of the EU and its peculiar interpretation into the Greek reality.

Social protection in our country puts too much emphasis, through the social budget, on *pensions*. The lack of adequate social assistance infrastructures renders in practice pensions as an ineffective 'informal tool' for combating poverty and exclusion³.

Child poverty is seen as a key indicator of social living conditions. Graph 1 shows the rates of child poverty in the EU on 2012, where Greece ranks 4th in child poverty (26.9% versus 20.8% of the EU average)¹¹. Graph 2 depicts over time, from 2005 to 2012, the percentage of children under 18 years of age in condition of poverty (35.4% in Greece)¹¹. The poverty rate in young people between 16-24 years, on 2012, was 32.3%, almost 9 units higher than the EU average (see Graph 3)¹¹.

The social situation of the unemployed and of children, as well as, young people is a first priority target of European social policy, because it poses risks of disruption of social cohesion. In this context, food action has been a policy urgent importance for the EU. Then, we focus on two non-profit organizations which act in the area of combating poverty of the most deprived in our country.

Data from the study of the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (IOBE)⁸ on the nutritional crisis, show that the food bank (private non-profit initiative of AB-Vasilopoulos) constitute a visible intervention in a sector of high Importance in the fight against poverty.

The Food Bank in Greece

The Food Bank was founded in 1995 as an independent and self-governed charitable foundation on the initiative of Gerasimos Basilopoulos (Presidential Decree of Government Gazette 540/21.6.95). The Food Bank is a social innovation for Greece with sole purpose the combat against hunger and the limitation of food waste. Since its founding, it has been included as an equal member in the European Food Banking Federation (EFBF), bringing in that way in Greece the model of other European food banks. The system is based on food donations from consumers to cooperating supermarket chains. At the same time, while the exemption of VAT from food donations was established with Law 4238/2014, in practice it does not apply.

The deep and prolonged economic crisis in Greece has serious social ramifications. As a result of long-term unemployment and the fall in per capita income, a significant proportion of the population is facing difficulties in securing necessary goods². In this context is included the operation of the food banks, which contribute decisively in the combat against food poverty, as well as, to the reduction of food waste.

The existing private Food Bank collects food in the stores of Sklavenitis, My Market and AB Vasilopoulos at certain dates and times, with the assistance of volunteers working on the movement of food and with the support of volunteer drivers, who use their own cars. The products are donations by the consumers.

In Europe, Food Banks are public and are

financed by FEAD, they buy themselves food from cooperatives and they distribute it to those in need, who are of course identified through the unemployment management system (Job Center). The Food Bank in Greece, according to the research of IOBE, does not have a relevant cooperation with the Department of FEAD (Ministry of Labour), nor with the Job Center (OAED). It collaborates with the "Ark of The World" by providing the food donations it manages on a voluntary basis. Volunteering is part of general care towards the unemployed and those in need (Foundations), where in Europe it is relatively small as a percentage, since the social system operates inclusively for all on the basis of the public interest so as to address social risks. In our case, a partnership with public (FEAD) and private (non-profit food bank) bodies should have been established, aiming at the creation of a synergy against hunger. It is, of course, ironic that at the same time *public and private (for-profit) partnerships* operate in our country on a rather broader basis.

The Ark of the World

The Ark of the World¹² is a voluntary non-governmental Organisation for the care and protection of the Mother and Child, founded in 1998 by a member of the Church of Greece and constitute an example of a response to the needs of protection and care of children and mothers in poverty. The Ark operates *without any public subsidy* and with the support of citizens and sponsors, such as the Food bank. Volunteering is multi-level, as the work of the Ark is framed by human resources of hundreds of volunteers, as well as, salaried professionals. In collaboration with the juveniles' Prosecutors, the protection bodies and the children's rights services, the Ark takes responsibility for the raising of minors in six Centers (Athens, Dionysos, Piraeus, Volos, Pogoniani, Chios). Children who have suffered abuse, neglect and need protection find shelter in the Ark. The children live in large houses with educators – caregivers, which take care for their daily routine and their service consist a non-institutional type of care. Even in cases of one-parent families with serious economic and social problems, which apply for assistance, they caregivers support their very basic needs, such as food, clothing, and all else is needed¹².

The children can find a family environment in the Ark of the World thanks to the efforts of Father

Antonios Papanikolaou. With the voluntary contributions of civil society and *without the assistance of a public body*, the Ark provides its services through a fairly well organized operation system, which is evident from the information on their website and the impact of their actions to the wider society.

An example follows, on how the social non-profit services of the Ark can be developed with the description of the case of a sponsorship by a citizen belonging to a particular Municipality, which has been published at the local newspaper of the Municipality of Dionysos in the Attica Region.

*"But what is not yet widely known is the fact, that the Ark of the World for about a month has found another safe haven in 'Anoiksi' (Municipal Community) of the Municipality of Dionysos. As the Father Anthony informs us, a resident of the region donated to the Ark of the World its furnished property on Lycabettus Street, so as to reclaim it for its purposes as a Hospitality Home. The donation, continues the priest, could not have been done at a better time, since in that way the Ark could defuse the population of children -constantly rising- in its other homes. In the House at Anoiksi today, there are 17 children, all boys, since the structures of the Ark are not mixed, aged between 5-15 years, who attend the elementary school and the gymnasium of Anoiksi. Because, in fact, the pupils of the elementary school are many, 4 of them go temporarily to Agios Stefanos Elementary, while during the school year they will be transferred to Anoiksi, where another department will be created. The first local institution, indeed, which immediately came into contact and responded to the needs of the new House, was the Anoiksi Sports Club, which enables all children to participate in its departments completely free of charge. The children, says Father Antonios, are all Greek, among them and Greek Roma, while two of them are from Uganda, but born in Greece, "because the Ark embraces all children. And I must tell you that with education and principles that the children are taking by us, one cannot distinguish whether they are Greek or not.... In Chios there is a large group of volunteers' which are ladies who have undertaken not only the little Greeks children but also the refugee little children, who were left at the ark with only their wet clothes. But in Piraeus, we have developed a large network of volunteers"*¹³.

On June 2017, the Ark of the World was incor-

porated into three National Registries operating in three different ministries in Athens. The first concerns the National Registry of Non-profit Private sector bodies providing social care services and the Special Registry of Voluntary Non-profit Organizations of the *Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity*. The second concerns its certification as a non-profit Social Care provider by the *Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity* and the third concerns its inclusion, with registry number 468, in the Special Registry of Non-governmental Organizations of the Directorate General of International Development Cooperation (Hellenic Aid-4th Directorate) of the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. This obviously entitles the Agency to receive funding from corresponding EU services for humanitarian aid and also involves foreign populations in Greece and of course missions abroad, as part of the European Development policy. What is important, however, is to see whether this recognition also means, as well, a substantial financial assistance for the essential needs of the operation of its infrastructures, which obviously had to be covered by the respective State bodies of social solidarity, i.e. the two Ministries that have included (Health) and certified (Work) the Ark. At the same time, large organizations should have undertake, in the context of corporate responsibility, to cover basic operational needs, as presented with transparency on the Foundation's website.

The crisis of poverty and exclusion, which imprint we have presented, does not seem to have changed the public policy towards this Institution. Perhaps, there is too a matter of public social management capacity, as indicates the announced withdrawal from Greece of the International Red Cross in a few months.

The above example, in combination with the national data relating to the humanitarian crisis management policy, allows us to interpret the fact that the social crisis in Greece, while lasting, does not appear to have brought about the necessary systemic changes for social modernization, resulting in charity/volunteering being important forces in tackling child poverty, without the assistance of local "economic" institutions, who seem to not apply European social practices. That is why the current management regime of the 'economic crisis' is ineffective, as it is characterized by piecemeal actions (often without transparency) and inability to absorb community funds for addressing a problem such as that of

the food crisis. The two important private initiatives, which we mentioned above, do not seem to be linked with the actions of the essentially responsible organization for the financing of food actions for the unemployed and others in solidarity institutions. Nutrition is a basic necessity for everyday life, whereas the inability to provide it to those in need, the moment where experienced organizations are in place so as to manage this distribution should be subject to further investigation of violation of human rights, especially when there are so many large amounts of community resources unspent, which in addition would also strengthen the country's rural economy.

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Conclusion

The crisis in Greece is social but not treated as such. The major social problems of child poverty and unemployment are addressed dramatically without general rules, but with voluntary forms such as the Ark of the World, among others, which do not though receive substantial assistance in the fight against Poverty (despite their official recognition). The situation we have presented shows a piecemeal and difficult to be sociologically comprehended management of an extreme and dangerous social phenomenon of poverty, long-term unemployment and youth unemployment. At the same time, the nutritional crisis exists in conditions of nutritional sufficiency and a great waste of food. The Food Bank is an example that works in the frameworks of the fight of hunger in EU countries. Additionally, agricultural cooperatives are the partners of these banks. Tackling poverty is a fundamental obligation of every State as an element

of basic social assistance. In the case of the Greek Food Bank, we observed a lack of cooperation with the public body responsible for exercising this solidarity action, at the same time, where an excessively limited use of the allocated funds is noted. Public Food Banks are not created as in other European countries. Such cooperation would strengthen agricultural cooperatives in the country and would increase their share in the market. Unfortunately, there exist no consumer cooperatives (and their stores), necessary for the operation of the market, in the major cities of mainland Greece. The policy on Food Banks in Greece would provide great assistance to the farmers and livestock farmers, who do not have markets in the big cities, which include as well unemployed in need for unemployment.

In our country, notable absences of partnerships are observed with unpleasant effects for the weak and the socially excluded. The system of solidarity-based distribution of emergency items based *on cooperatives and a social (general) management character* of poverty and long-term unemployment would have a significant impact on the reduction of crime. Poverty management (sociologists, social workers), together with education/training, family, and employment policy, constitutes a key element of *primary social control*, which generates social cohesion. Police constitutes the main secondary social protection control but cannot be used continuously in place of the primary control mechanism. The problem (stakes) is social cohesion and the capacity for social governance with social measures of prevention and solidarity instead of repression^{4, 6, 14}.

The voluntary dynamics of the community (Church - Ark of the World) and the Charity of an entrepreneur (Vasilopoulos - Food Bank) were initiatives that the State could not find a way to strengthen. Extreme social poverty and long-term unemployment along with limited enhancement to income with benefits has created, perhaps for the first time, conditions for the perfect social storm. The inability of social inclusion in labor for a large proportion of young people and lasting poverty^{15,16} without food aid, marks a break-in of the system of primary social control and institutes obviously expected risks for populations which seek relief and support. The inability to understand the phenomenon of this major inequality endangers the security of society. Preventive mechanisms for managing the humanitarian crisis must be reinforced through cooperation in

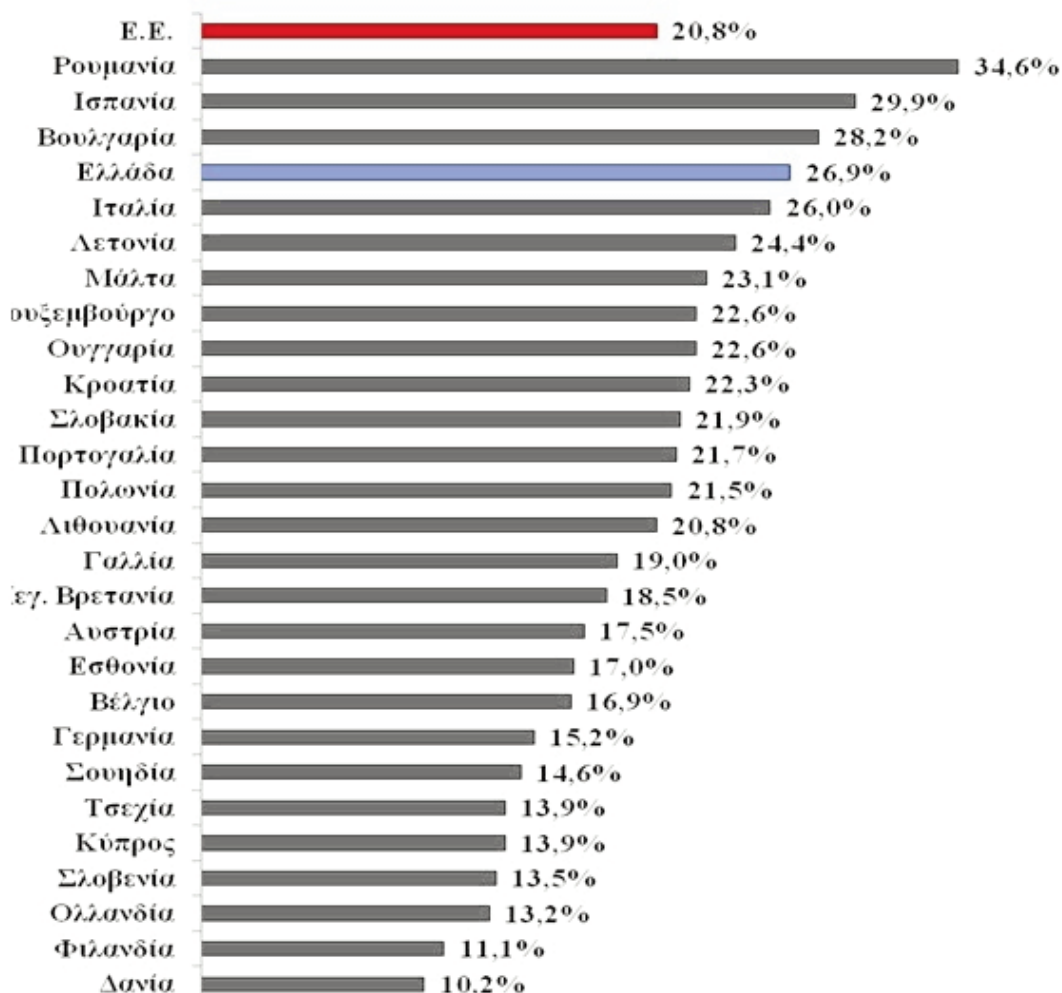
tackling poverty and unemployment. Partnerships should be established in order to solve this nutritional, and not only, social crisis, which is now of *central importance even though it concerns the social margin*.

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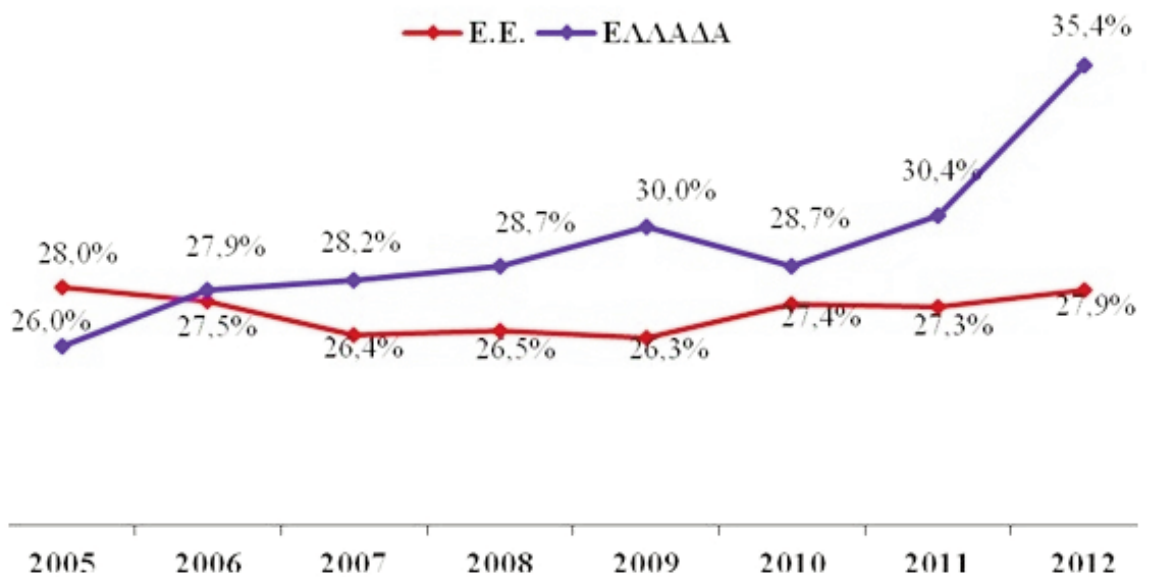
Γράφημα 1

Παιδική φτώχεια στην Ε.Ε. (2012) (Πηγή: Eurostat)



Γράφημα 2

Φτώχεια ή Κοινωνικός Αποκλεισμός σε παιδιά κάτω των 18 ετών (Πηγή: Eurostat)



Γράφημα 3

Ποσοστό (%) φτώχειας ατόμων 16-24 ετών (Πηγή: Eurostat)

