

# Greece (Ελλάδα)



The Hellenic Republic (Greece) is a state in southern Europe located on the Mediterranean Sea. Greek sovereign land includes 6,000 islands and islets and is known as the home of democracy. Athenian democracy dates back to the 5th century BCE in which a portion of the citizenry were given the right to direct democracy. However, Greece did not remain a democracy ever since, with periods of dictatorships, oligarchies, and Empire. Most recently, Greece was under a military junta from 1967-74. The current Greek government has been led by the Syriza party (formally: The Coalition of the Radical Left) under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras since January 2015. Tsipras was elected to government following the sovereign debt crisis in Europe with the promise of defending Greece against its creditors.

## QUICK FACTS

- Population:** 10.86 million
- Area:** 131,957 sq. km (Comparable to Alabama)
- Capital:** Athens
- Languages:** Greek
- GDP Per Capita: \$18,035 (2015)
- Head of State: President Prokopis Pavlopoulos
- Head of Government: Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras

## EDUCATION

The Greek education system is compulsory through the secondary (high school equivalent) level. The system is comprised of a primary, secondary, and tertiary (universities and non-university vocational schools). Greece dedicates roughly 4% of its GDP to education and had a literacy rate of 97.5 in 2015.



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## RELIGION

According to the US State Department, 98% of the Greek public identify as being part of the Greek Orthodox Church (though the Greek Government does not keep statistics on religious groups). Additionally, 1.3% of the population is Muslim, the remainder are Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Jehovah's Witness. The Greek constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government maintains a secular stance; the government also provides secular bilingual schooling, and in Thrace (due to the Treaty of Lausanne) the government operates two Islamic schools.

## ETHNICITY and DEMOGRAPHICS

Greece has faced demographic problems over the past several years with a negative population growth rate (deaths outnumbering births and emigration outnumbering immigration). The rates mean that as the population continues the age the burden on retirement programs can become drastic as the ratio of working Greeks—retired Greeks becomes economically unsustainable.

Based on data from a 2001 census, 93% of those in Greece hold Greek citizenship, the remaining 7% are foreign citizens (Greece does not collect data on ethnicity). Following the Syrian Refugee Crisis, there has been approximately 857,000 arrivals by sea in Greece since 2015 according to the UN Refugee Agency.



## CONTEMPORARY GREECE

Greece's economy has been struggling since the global financial crisis in 2007 exposed the fragile Greek economic system. Since its sovereign debt crisis, Greece's Gross Domestic Product has declined by roughly 25%, its total unemployment amongst the working age population was 24.4% in late 2015, and amongst 15-24 year olds unemployment was 49% (far above the 19% average across the EU). In 2010, Greece's credit was downgraded to the lowest possible credit rating and has since received several bailouts from the International Monetary Fund.

Greece's economy is considered a capitalist and advanced economy that is reliant on the services industry, shipping, tourism, and agriculture. Nearly 40% of the overall GDP is accounted for by the public sector and 18% by tourism. Greece maintains the largest merchant navy in the world; it is also a major beneficiary of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, and general EU aid dollars.

## GREEK HERITAGE IN THE USA

The 2010 US Census reported that there are 1.3 million people living in the US with Greek heritage, making Greek Americans the largest overseas Greek community. There has been a Greek presence in New Orleans dating back to the 18th century and the first Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America was built there in 1866. Most of the Greek American community lives on the east coast in cities such as Astoria (Queens, New York), and Tarpon Springs, FL which has the highest concentration of Greek Americans.



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## DID YOU KNOW?

- *The Olympic Games originated in Ancient Greece*
- *About 7% of all the marble produced in the world comes from Greece*
- *In the 1950s only about 30% of Greek adults could read or write*
- *Greece has more archaeological museums than any other country in the world*
- *The Greek language has been spoken for over 3,000 years*

## FAMOUS GREEKS

*Greece has been the home to many well-known people over the last several thousand years. There have also been many famous people with Greek ancestry. Prince Phillip, the Queen Consort (the husband of Queen Elizabeth II) was born in Greece. Several philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, come from Greece as does the poet Homer. Modern examples of well-known Greeks include the journalist Arianna Huffington, retired professional tennis player Pete Sampras (born in the US to Greek Parents), and Aristotle Onassis (born in Turkey to Greek parents) who was a shipping magnate and married to Jaqueline Kennedy.*



*The Greek flag consists of nine equal horizontal blue and white stripes, and a blue square with a white cross in the top left corner.*



## USEFUL LINKS

[https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/greece\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/greece_en)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gr.html>