



GREECE



BY THE
NUMBERS

10.6 MILLION
COUNTRY POPULATION

~ 5,000
JEWISH POPULATION

1915
JDC ENTRY DATE

For more than 2,000 years, Jews have found a home in Greece. Today, JDC helps ensure that Greek Jews have what they need to thrive.

From Athens to Thessaloniki, Jews have had a lasting legacy on Greek culture and history. On the island of Delos, archeologists discovered one of the world's oldest synagogues, and in many Greek cities, you can still see vestiges of Jewish life that date back to the Babylonian exile.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, Jewish life flourished in Greece when Salonika (now Thessaloniki) earned the nickname "Jerusalem of the Balkans," with over 30,000 Jews — half the country's Jewish population — calling it

home. Jewish life thrived here until the Holocaust, when Nazis murdered a shocking 85% of Greece's 76,000 Jews. More than 70 years later, Greek Jews are looking toward the future, supporting their most vulnerable while also cultivating the next generation of Greek Jewish life.

For more than a century, JDC has stood by their side, aiding the vulnerable and strengthening Greek Jewish institutions. In 1915 — less than a year after JDC's founding — JDC sent financial help to the chief rabbi of Thessaloniki, and in 1917, after a fire destroyed Thessaloniki's Jewish Quarter, JDC helped rebuild the community. During the Holocaust, JDC was instrumental in rescuing Greek Jews, partnering with the Jewish Refugee Committee in Athens to help more than 5,700 Jews escape. And JDC continued to provide refugee assistance well into the 1950s.

Today, JDC helps support elderly and vulnerable Jews and works to strengthen Jewish life. Despite recent challenges — like the 2008 and 2011 financial crises, which devastated Greece's economy — the Jewish community is determined to build a future, and JDC is there to support them every step of the way.



Children dance the hora at a JDC-supported summer camp. Athens, 1948.



JDC in Greece: A Snapshot

CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE

The 2011 financial crisis brought the Greek economy to its knees, and many Jews lost their livelihoods. The Jewish community in Athens — the largest in Greece — was particularly hard-hit, and requests for social assistance spiked. At this critical time, JDC stepped in, bolstering the community's already-existing care networks.

More than a decade later, JDC continues to help Greece's most vulnerable Jews live dignified lives. In partnership with the Jewish Community of Athens, JDC provided more than 150 vulnerable community members with financial, psychosocial, and medical support in 2021, and another 550 community members received COVID-19 emergency relief.

Beyond immediate relief, JDC develops programs that respond to the community's emerging needs. In November 2021, JDC helped the Athens Jewish community launch Warm House — a day center program for Jewish seniors. The first center of its kind in Greece, Warm House is a pilot program that aims to combat social isolation amongst elderly Jews, and provide cultural programming, medical consultations, and meals.

CULTIVATING A JEWISH FUTURE AND JEWISH LEADERS

By investing in education and capacity building, JDC helps to ensure that Greece has a vibrant Jewish future. Through the inclusion of Greek participants in leadership training initiatives, such as the Buncher Community Leadership Program, Leatid, Yesod, and more, JDC equips Jewish leaders and professionals with the necessary tools to address their community's needs. During these events and trainings, Greek



participants have the chance to meet and collaborate with their peers from the rest of Jewish Europe and the world. In addition, JDC empowers young Greek Jews by subsidizing their participation in pan-European young adult platforms and camps, engages young adults in community work, and even enables vocational training during difficult economic times.

JDC also works closely with Jewish lay leaders and professionals from across Greece, strengthening their capacity for governance and strategic planning. For example, in 2016, the Jewish community of Athens participated in JDC's resilience-building initiative. Working closely with community leadership, JDC developed a tailor-made capacity building program that consisted of trainings, consultancy, and community activities. This pilot initiative aimed to strengthen the community's core competencies and resilience, so that they can respond in times of crisis and emergency, and care for each other in times of peace.

JDC in Greece: Images Across Time



Images from left: An elderly woman receives a new pair of shoes given by JDC. Athens, 1948. A group of children at a JDC-supported orphanage. Athens, 1948. Students at a JDC-supported Jewish school in Athens eat lunch. Athens, 1948. A blind musician plays an accordion purchased with a loan from JDC. Athens, 1950s.

