A QUIET LETTER ABOUT THE NUMBERS WE ALL PAY

The World Upside Down

Greece · 2026

Dear stranger,

1. The price of a person

Greece reports no average cost for one day of detention.

What the Greek state does publish, in the European classification of government spending, is its whole public bill for prisons. What the Council of Europe publishes, from the prison administration's own return, is the number of days served. This letter divides one by the other.

One day in a Greek prison costs €45.59.

One day in a primary school costs €10.61.

The difference is 4.3 times.

That is the whole comparison.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: general government expenditure on prisons (COFOG function GF0304), €178.0 million for Greece (gov_10a_exp, sector S13, national currency). Government expenditure by function includes the pay of the staff who run the prisons.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Council of Europe, SPACE I 2025, 2024 data: Table 33, Greece row — the prison administration reports no average amount spent per day (columns 33A, 33B and 33C are NA) and reports 3,904,481 days spent in penal institutions in 2024. The same row reports a total prison-administration budget of €40,146,163.20. That budget is not used here: divided by the same days it gives €10.28, below the school figure and about a quarter of the Eurostat prisons total. The letter divides the Eurostat figure by the days instead.
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf
- Eurostat, 2023: €3,874.2 of public expenditure per primary-school pupil (educ_uoe_fine09, ISCED 1, euro, full-time equivalent). The series runs to 2023 and carries no 2024 observation for Greece.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_fine09/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 178000000 / 3904481 = 45.59; 3874.2 / 365 = 10.61; 45.59 / 10.61 = 4.30, shown as 4.3.

2. The price of a job

A lawyer earns €59.12 a day.

An accountant earns €51.92 a day.

A teacher earns €56.86 a day.

A cleaner earns €42.46 a day.

All four are gross, before tax.

These four figures do not come from one source, but they describe one moment: the start of a working life. The lawyer and the accountant are the middle of a Greek wage survey's starting ranges. The survey's starting band for a lawyer runs from about nine hundred euro a month to about sixteen hundred; for an accountant, from about nine hundred to about thirteen hundred and fifty. Across whole careers its ranges run much higher, past three thousand euro for a lawyer and past twenty-six hundred for an accountant. The teacher's figure is the first step of the state's salary scale, which rises through nineteen steps to almost twice as much. The cleaner's figure is the statutory minimum wage, the same for every full-time employee in the country.

Each monthly figure is multiplied by twelve, divided by two hundred and sixty working days, and shown as a day.

The range itself is the story.

Sources:

- WageIndicator Foundation, 2026: occupation pages for Greece, gross monthly earnings. Lawyers: €924–€3,253 for the majority of workers; €924–€1,638 at the start of practice; €1,135–€2,043 after five years. Accountants: €898–€2,653 for the majority; €898–€1,352 at the start; €1,118–€1,689 after five years. The letter uses the midpoint of each starting band: €1,281 for the lawyer and €1,125 for the accountant. These are survey ranges, not official statistics; the pages publish no median.
- https://wageindicator.org/el-gr/ergasia-stin-ellada/epangelmata-kai-misthoi/dikegoroi/
- https://wageindicator.org/el-gr/ergasia-stin-ellada/epangelmata-kai-misthoi/logistes/
- Ministry of National Economy and Finance, General Accounting Office, 2026: circular 54692/2026 "????????????? ??????? ?????? ?????????? ???????? ????? ????? 2026" (adaptation of the basic salaries of public-sector staff for 2026), appendix, Table 1, basic salaries of category ?? from 1 April 2026: step 1 €1,232; step 19 €2,294. Teachers are paid on this scale.
- https://apothetirio.e-dm.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/2026-54692-??????-??????????-???-???????.pdf
- Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2026: statutory minimum wage €920 a month for full-time employees from 1 April 2026; the statutory daily wage for manual workers is €41.09. Used as the cleaner's floor, not a cleaner's survey median.
- https://ypergasias.gov.gr/se-ischy-apo-simera-o-neos-katotatos-misthos-ofelei-15-ekatommyrio-polites/
- Calculation: 1281 * 12 / 260 = 59.12; 1125 * 12 / 260 = 51.92; 1232 * 12 / 260 = 56.86; 920 * 12 / 260 = 42.46.

3. The loop

The government takes in €124,282,000,000.00.

The government spends €119,347,000,000.00.

The difference is €4,935,000,000.00.

This time the difference is a surplus. The state took in more than it spent.

The loop is not broken. It is simply pointed somewhere.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2025: general government (S13) total revenue €124,282 million and total expenditure €119,347 million (gov_10a_main, euro). Central government, local government and social-security funds together. Updated 2026-10-21; no provisional status flag on the 2025 observations.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_main/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2025: net lending of €4,935 million, 2.0% of GDP (gov_10a_main, B9); general government gross debt 145.4% of GDP (gov_10dd_edpt1, sector S13, Maastricht definition).
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10dd_edpt1/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 124,282 ? 119,347 = 4,935 million euro.

4. Where the loop points

The single largest item is old-age pensions: €27,947,000,000.00.

A lot of money goes to catching people after they fall.

Much less goes to making sure they do not fall in the first place.

This is not a conspiracy. It is a habit.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF1002 (old age), general government, €27,947 million — 24.5% of total expenditure and the largest single sub-function. The whole social-protection function (GF10) is €41,869 million, 36.7% of the total. For comparison: health (GF07) €13,564 million, education (GF09) €9,330 million, hospital services (GF0703) €8,253 million, transport (GF0405) €6,426 million, pre-primary and primary education (GF0901) €2,813 million, defence (GF02) €5,270 million, police services (GF0301) €2,765 million, prisons (GF0304) €178 million, 0.2% of the total. Total expenditure across all COFOG functions is €114,222 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en

5. Five lines worth naming

Pre-primary and primary education: about €7,706,849.32 per day (€2,813,000,000.00 per year).

Transport: about €17,605,479.45 per day (€6,426,000,000.00 per year).

Hospital services: about €22,610,958.90 per day (€8,253,000,000.00 per year).

Defence: about €14,438,356.16 per day (€5,270,000,000.00 per year).

Police services: about €7,575,342.47 per day (€2,765,000,000.00 per year).

Some are large. Some are small. Each of them is a decision, written down.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0901 (pre-primary and primary education), €2,813 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0405 (transport), €6,426 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0703 (hospital services), €8,253 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF02 (defence), €5,270 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0301 (police services), €2,765 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Daily figures divide each annual amount by 365.

6. The habit

We are all part of this habit.

We pay taxes. We vote. We work. We accept the numbers.

Not because we consciously chose them, but because we were born into them.

No one ever showed us the whole picture at once. This letter is that picture.

7. The other number

One cent per day. That is €3.65 per person per year.

The idea is simple: instead of paying €45.59 every day for the end of someone's story, what happens if many people each give one cent a day for the beginning of the story?

You give one cent every day. Over a full year that is €3.65.

No promises. No guarantees. No returns.

Just a place, a question, a group of people, a very small amount of money, and the freedom to stop at any time.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is €3.65.
- Eurostat, 2024: the €178.0 million general-government prisons total and the €3,904,481 days quoted in chapter 1, which give the daily prison cost named here.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf

8. What this letter is not

It is not a business plan. It is not a political programme. It is not a religion. It is not a solution.

It is a mirror.

9. What you can do

Nothing. Or something. That is the whole choice.

You can look at the public numbers. You can join the experiment and give one cent a day, €3.65 a year. Or you can close this letter and forget it.

No one is obliged. That is the point.

10. The world upside down

It costs more to keep someone in a cell than to teach a child.

It costs more to treat people after they fall than to prevent the fall.

It costs more to argue than to listen.

It costs more to count the money than to spend it well.

This letter does not turn the world the right way up. It only shows you that it is currently upside down.

11. One last number

One cent. Per day. Per person. €3.65 per year.

That is all that is asked. Not because it is enough, but because it is honest, and because it is completely yours to choose.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is €3.65.

12. The layer underneath

The differences are psychotic. Extreme is not too strong a word.

One day in a Greek prison costs more than four days in a Greek classroom. A lawyer's day is worth about a third more than a cleaner's, and a teacher's day is worth almost as much as a lawyer's. These numbers are public, they are measured, and they were chosen.

Money is not the problem. The money exists. The state takes in more than a hundred and twenty billion euro a year, spends less than it takes in, and still runs a surplus; its debt is nearly one and a half times everything the country produces. The loop turns. The problem is where the money goes.

The price is not the problem either. The price of a prisoner, a teacher, a child or a cleaner is not a natural law. These prices were decided. They can be decided differently.

What lies underneath is consent, choices, expectations, input.

We consent to these numbers, not because we voted for them, but because we never refused them. We make choices, or we let others make them for us. We carry expectations about what work is worth, who deserves what, what a child needs, and what a prisoner costs. And we either give input into the system, or we stay silent.

The numbers are not the problem. Our consent is the material. Our choices are the shape. Our expectations are the weight. Our input is the only thing that can change it.

With quiet hope, A stranger