



OUTCAN Guide | Life in Athens, Greece

LOCATION

Country: Greece

Town: Athens

Base: Canadian Embassy

Other info to Consider:

- Family (non-dependants) can visit and stay 90 days **without visa**.

POPULATION

Size: 3,154,591

Ethnicity: Greek. Like most of Greece, Athens has a homogeneous population. The main recognized minority is the Muslim minority.

LANGUAGE(S)

Official language: Greek.

Prevalence of French or English speaking: Very limited. Some will speak English as 2nd or 3rd language but limited. The official language of Greece is Greek, spoken by 99% of the population. In addition, a number of non-official, minority languages and some Greek dialects are spoken as well. The most foreign languages learned by Greeks are English, German, French and Italian.

COST OF LIVING

- **Exchange rate to consider:** Euro. 1 EUR =1.47652 CAD (March 2024)

QUALITY OF LIFE

Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:

- Athens has a hot-summer Mediterranean climate. The dominant feature of Athens' climate is alternation between prolonged hot and dry summers and mild winters with moderate rainfall.
- Athens is affected by the urban heat island effect in some areas which is caused by human activity.

Laws and Culture:

- Canadians with dual citizenship or who are eligible for Greek citizenship may be subject to compulsory military service and other aspects of Greek law. Canadians should obtain a document certifying their status from the Embassy of Greece prior to travel.
- Penalties for possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs are severe. Convicted offenders can expect jail sentences or heavy fines.

Safety and Security:

- Petty crime, such as pickpocketing, purse snatching and luggage theft, is common in tourist areas and on public transportation. This includes the trains to and from Athens International Airport.
- In Athens, do not walk in the Monastiraki and Omonia districts after dark, or around the Larissa and Peloponnese railway/bus stations.
- Demonstrations and strikes take place regularly in Athens, and occasionally in other parts of the country.
- You must carry a valid Canadian driver's licence and an International Driving Permit.
- Athens is one of the most polluted cities in Europe.

Level of isolation:

- There is only 1 Canadian family posted to Athens (embassy).
- The language challenges can cause a high level of isolation, particularly among spouses.

HOUSING

- Arranged by Embassy, no HHT or DIT, position falls under Global Affairs Canada (GAC).
- Unfurnished.

EMPLOYMENT

Are there employment opportunities for spouses? Due to tax and legal implications, spousal employment on the economy is not a realistic option.

- Employment is extremely limited. Families should plan to be a single-income family for the duration of the posting. **CFMWS | MFS | OUTCAN Europe | CFMWS**
- Limited due to language barrier.

HEALTH CARE

Access:

- Greece's health care system was ranked by the World Health Organization as one of the best in the world.
- English services are available but limited, French is very limited.
- The Canadian Medical Clinic in Geilenkirchen is responsible for the healthcare of all Canadian military members in Europe and can be accessed.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP. **PSHCP Member Portal (pshcp-msh.ca)**

Resources for children with special needs:

- Very limited in English or French.
- Depending on language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed,
- It is highly advised that the family consult with Medical Screening Officer in Canada and / or the Canadian Element to ensure that the required services are readily available in either English or French before accepting a posting.

Consideration for pregnancy / birth: Health care for pregnancy and birth is available on the economy, private.

Dental: Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay up front, and you can then claim your expenses

SCHOOLING

- For an approved list of schools, please contact Children's Education Management at: **CEMGEE@forces.gc.ca**
- **Children's Education Management - Canada.ca**
- **Gestion de l'éducation des enfants - Canada.ca**

Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:

- The Curriculum varies depending on choice of school.
- None of them offers Canadian history or geography.

Resources for special need children:

- Access to special needs services is depending on the choice of school, language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed, it may be very limited
- Consult with CEM/GAC and school prior to any commitments.

CHILDCARE

- Local childcare is available.
- When choosing local childcare there is no guarantee that staff will be English or French-speaking.
- Some school will offer before and after school programs, from free to fee paying

TRANSPORTATION

Things to Consider: Athens's International Airport (ATH).

- You must carry an international driving permit (IDP) and a valid Canadian driver's licence to drive in Greece.
- Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05 percent. Impaired drivers could face immediate detention and convicted offenders can expect fines and jail sentences.
- Traffic jams are the norm in the center of Athens even during the late-night hours
- Traffic in the center of Athens is restricted, partly to alleviate traffic jams, but mostly to minimize pollution. The area is defined by a sign with a prominent "Δ" and is in effect September through June.
- Cars with a license plate that ends in an odd number are allowed in the "daktylios" (or ring) on odd days, and cars with license plates that end in even number are allowed to drive in the center of Athens on even days. Diplomatic – plates. Restrictions do not apply.

Public transportation:

- The Athens public transport system is affordable, reliable and covers most of the city and suburbs.

RESOURCES AND AMENITIES

Is there a Military Family Services centre available in that location?

- No physical centre. Families in Greece are supported by the Remote Team: **MFSE.Remotes@cfmws.com**
- Psychosocial / Mental Health Resources:** Not at post, MFS(E) SW for dependants only, CAF SW/Mental Health Team for member and family are located in Geilenkirchen, Germany and Padre is Italy.
- Communications (e.g. Quality of Internet connection):** Quality of internet connection is depending on location and can vary.

ACTIVITIES

Access to sports or other leisure activities:

- Yes, on the economy. Very limited in English/French

Availability of playgrounds: Yes, but quality depends on area/location. School grounds/playgrounds are locked outside the school hours.

RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are common law relationships recognized? Yes, but only between 2-non-Greek individuals.

Are same sex couples recognized? Yes, Greece joined this list in late 2015 when it agreed to begin recognizing same-sex civil partnerships despite opposition from the Greek Orthodox Church.

Medications that are illegal in the country: use without a prescription of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances is illegal.

Other Considerations:

- Postal services from Canada Post to CDA/ MPSS personnel are managed by the embassy.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- **European Commission Country Reports (2023)**
- https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2023-european-semester-country-reports_en
- **Canadian Travel Advisories**
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- **CIA World Factbooks (One Pagers from US)**
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/greece/travel-facts/>
- **Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)**
<https://www.gov.uk/world/greece>

For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below

- MFS(E) Social Worker: **MFSSocialWork@cfmws.com**
- CAF Social Worker: **GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca**
- MFS(E) Team: **MFSE.Remotes@cfmws.com**
- MFS(E) Regional Office: **+49 (0) 2451 717 173, MFS.Europe@cfmws.com**