Mortality and the economic crisis in Greece

In 2008, Greece entered a deep financial crisis, which has raised concerns about severe public health consequences, economic downturns historically being associated with increases in mortality.\(^1\) In 2012, there were 116\,670 deaths in Greece, the highest number since 1949. The 2008–12 rise in the number of deaths (figure) is attributed to the increase in the number of deaths in the oldest individuals, with 12.5% and 24.3% increases in people aged 80–84 years and older than 85 years, respectively (appendix).

Analysis of mortality data obtained from the Hellenic Statistical Authority shows that in 2012, after 4 years of austerity, age-adjusted mortality in Greece was lower than in 2008. Age-specific mortality rates decreased for all age groups, with the exception of slight increases for individuals aged 5–9 years, 35–39 years, 55–59 years, and 65–69 years. Furthermore, between 2008 and 2011, all-cause mortality was essentially unaffected, declining at a slightly higher rate (6.3%) than in the 3-year precrisis period (2005–08, 5.7%). This trend was reversed during 2011–12, driven by an increased mortality in individuals older than 55 years, but continued to decrease in people younger than 55 years. Almost two thirds of the additional deaths in 2012 are attributed to demographic ageing, whereas almost a third (about 2000 deaths) could be linked to austerity. Notably, a mortality increase of a smaller magnitude to that of 2011–12 was seen in 2006–07 (1.2% vs 1.7%), but was more marked in people younger than 55 years than in those older than 55 years (+2.9% vs +1.1%).

The 2011–12 increased mortality in people older than 55 years (about 2200 excess deaths) probably constitutes the first evident short-term consequence of austerity on mortality in Greece. Although deeper investigation into changes in cause-specific mortality rates is needed, this trend is probably related to barriers to access health care for chronically ill patients because of the drastic restrictions in health policies and the increase in uninsured individuals.\(^2\)

We declare that we have no competing interests.

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Maternal and child mortality in Greece

Financial crisis can be a threat to health,\(^3\) and International Monetary Fund programmes have been associated with impaired efforts to control child and maternal mortality.\(^2\) In 2008, Greece entered the most serious socioeconomic downturn in the country’s modern history, which has steadily worsened over the following years.\(^4\) Vlachadis and Kornarou\(^4\) reported that an increase in stillbirths in Greece was linked to the economic crisis; stillbirth rate increased from 3.31 per 1000 livebirths in 2008 to 4.36 in 2010, but the study included only the first 2 years of the crisis.\(^4\) Data for maternal health have not been analysed since 2006.\(^5\) In light of the socioeconomic crisis taking place in Greece, our aim was to investigate whether this crisis had an effect on stillbirths, and infant, child, and maternal mortality.

We investigated the potential association between the financial crisis (2008–12) and stillbirths, and infant, child, and maternal mortality, using the precrisis period (2003–07) as the referent. Stillbirth, infant and child mortality (per 1000 livebirths), and maternal mortality (number of maternal deaths per 100 000 livebirths) are shown in the table.

Infant mortality rate and child mortality rate did not differ between the precrisis and crisis periods (3.83 [95% CI 3.56–4.10] vs 3.17 [2.63–3.72], and 4.56 [4.18–4.93].

See Online for appendix
For the Hellenic Statistical Authority see http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE

