



FROM ANCIENT ROOTS TO FUTURE RESILIENCE

PATHWAYS FOR A JUST TRANSITION IN ATHENS' BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Part of the global project:
*Building for Today and the Future:
Advancing a Just Transition in the
Built Environment*

THE BUILDING FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE PROJECT

This report is one of eight city research summaries as part of the global IHRB project “Building for Today and the Future: Advancing a Just Transition in the Built Environment”

In Europe, buildings account for 40% of energy consumption and 36% of carbon dioxide emissions. In the 27 countries of the European Union (EU27), the residential building stock makes up 3/4 of the total stock. At the same time, cities are often where people experience the impacts of climate change, rising living costs, and socio-economic inequalities.

The project examines green transition processes in the built environment of eight cities globally, aiming to (1) strengthen the understanding of social justice and human rights issues in each context and globally, and (2) open up pathways for local and international action to improve the social sustainability of these processes. The results of this project will help stakeholders make informed decisions in urban and sustainability policies, and take steps towards implementation (in various contexts and at various levels of governance).

The project is structured in four research cycles, each undertaking parallel research in two cities to derive comparative insights. The pairs of cities are: Prague and Lagos, Lisbon and Melbourne, Copenhagen and Jakarta, Athens and Valparaíso.

The report intends to inform policy-makers, investors, and businesses involved in shaping the built environment in Athens, as well as civil society actors working to expand the space for socially inclusive climate action.



TERMINOLOGY

Built environment: The tangible urban environment, i.e. buildings, infrastructure and the spaces that connect them.

Built environment decarbonisation: Measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment by improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings, switching to renewable energy supplies, and reducing the climate footprint of construction materials.

Built environment resilience: Measures to strengthen the resilience of buildings and infrastructure to the impact of climate-related events such as flooding, extreme heat, and sea level rise.

Just transition: While pioneered by the labour movement and the ILO,¹ the wider concept today involves a series of aligned and coherent climate actions that effectively fulfil both environmental and social purposes:

1. A transition to an ecologically-conscious model that allows societal development within planetary boundaries, and
2. Ensure the benefits of that shift are equitably spread and enjoyed throughout the population, and that its costs are not borne by traditionally excluded or marginalised groups.

The project focuses particularly on four thematic areas of the built environment: the right to housing, construction workers' rights on site and through supply chains, non-discrimination and spatial justice, and meaningful participation.

The project recognises that “just transitions” are context specific, and that the overall concept continues to evolve. The project therefore aims to engage with local language, narrative and perspectives while also building international momentum for positive change. The local research is accompanied by visioning workshops that bring stakeholders together to envision pathways towards a more inclusive, sustainable and just city.

Workers' rights: Refers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, social dialogue in the transition process, no forced nor child labour, no discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment.² This applies to construction sites and throughout supply chains.

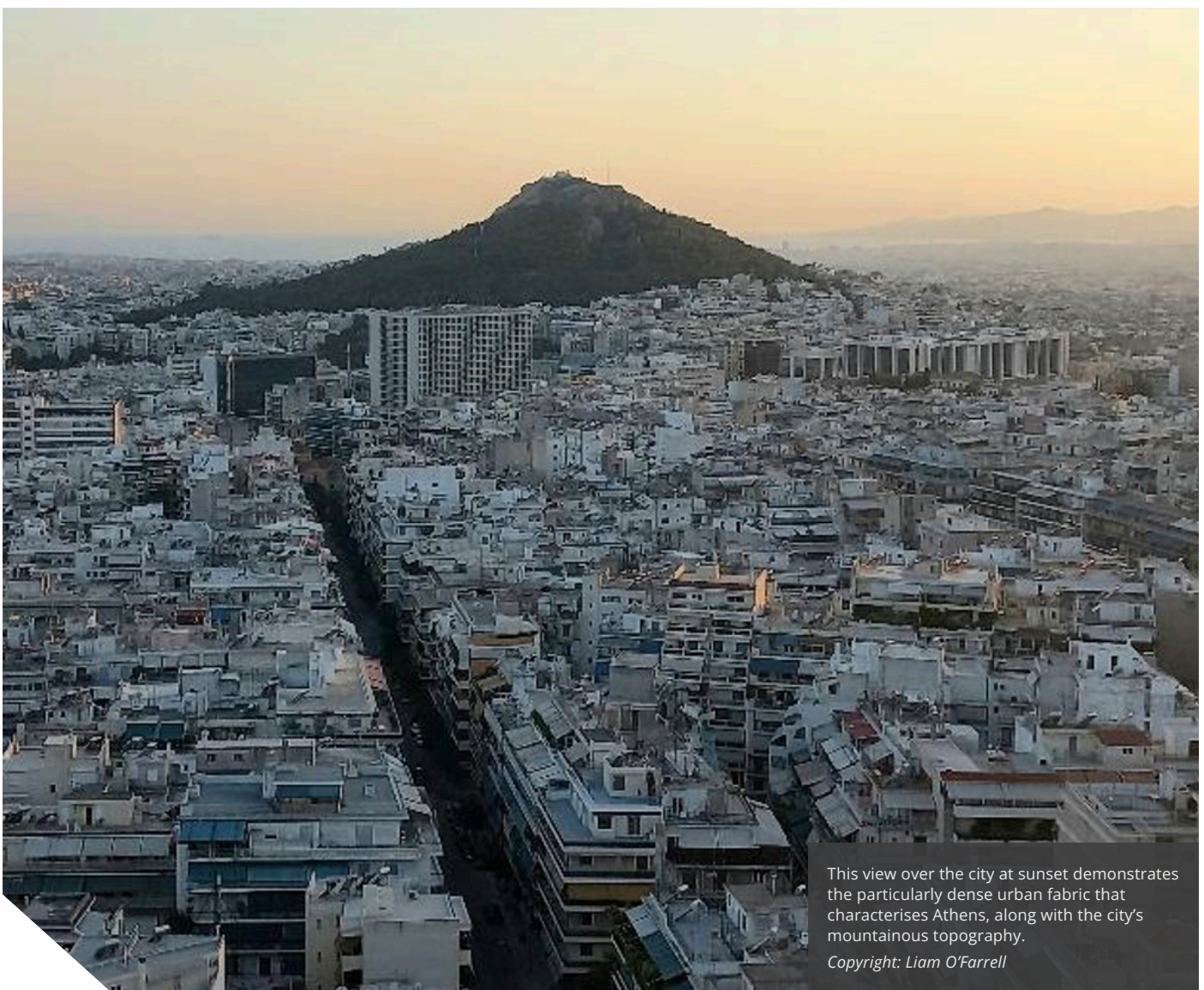
Right to housing: 'The right to live in a home in peace, security and dignity, and include security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, appropriate location and cultural adequacy'.³

Spatial justice: Refers to the right to a 'fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them', and an even development free of biases imposed on certain populations because of their geographical location.⁴ Spatial justice can be seen as the principle of non-discrimination applied to space.

Co-creation and meaningful participation: Based on the concept of 'the right to the city', it is the right of people to appropriate and shape the built environment they inhabit and use.⁵ Therefore, it is 'not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it'.⁶

Antiparochi: Refers to a bottom-up market mechanism for affordable housing provision, or 'mutual exchange', where individuals exchanged land or existing houses with developers who built blocks and reimbursed the owner with several apartments in return. This model was predominant in Greece throughout the post-WWII period, given the state had very limited involvement in housing provision.

Polykatoikies: Refers to a type of apartment blocks that resulted from the *antiparochi* model, which form the basis of Greece's urban fabric today (see Figure 2).



This view over the city at sunset demonstrates the particularly dense urban fabric that characterises Athens, along with the city's mountainous topography.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

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BWI
Building and Wood
Workers' International
www.bwint.org



Laudes ———
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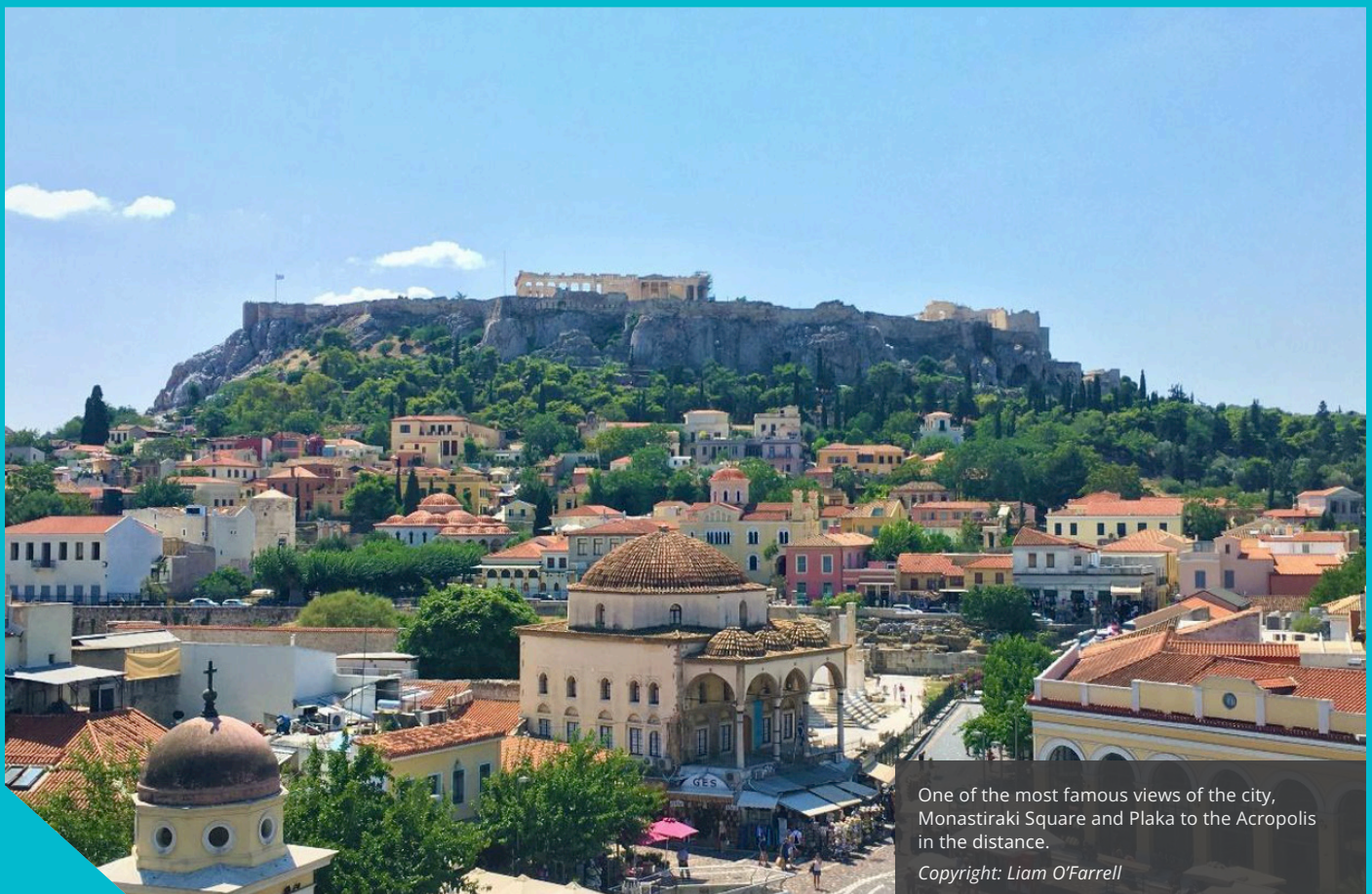
SUMMARY

Athens is at the start of its journey in climate action and resilience, and specifically in decarbonising its built environment. However, the city's climate actions do not always have strong social considerations such as spatial equity, affordability or citizen participation. The 2009-2018 economic crisis has left long-term scars upon the city that limit available resources, calling for creative, bottom-up solutions for a cleaner, greener and fairer city for all.

Athens shows low levels of social segregation compared to other cities in Europe. The worst of the economic crisis appears to be over, and Greece is now posting strong GDP growth figures and attracting significant foreign investment. Athens is a dense city lacking adequate green spaces and transport infrastructure. Therefore, in this case, density creates transport challenges and intensifies the urban heat island, but also makes planning an inclusive and diverse '15-minute city'⁷ easier to imagine in Athens than in cities with sprawling, low-density suburbs.

The emergence of civil society organisations and the influence of the EU on developing a culture of evaluation also give cause for optimism.

This report presents a brief overview of climate actions undertaken in Athens and some key human rights risks and opportunities of the green transition. It delves into the housing affordability struggle and how building decarbonisation can be harnessed for a fairer distribution of benefits arising from upgrading housing stock. It also touches on the topics of social and spatial segregation, participation and workers' rights, for instance how the precarious nature of construction jobs inhibits the upskilling of workers need for success in the green transition. The aim of this research report is to provide evidence supporting the need for a just and inclusive transition in Athens, as well as recommendations for local and national governments, businesses, and other built environment stakeholders on possible pathways to accomplish it.



One of the most famous views of the city, Monastiraki Square and Plaka to the Acropolis in the distance.

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RESEARCH PROCESS

The research undertaken for this study took place between October 2023 and February 2024, and included primary and secondary research methods. The local research team conducted a literature review and identified almost 120 stakeholders, subsequently interviewing 14 across government, businesses, NGOs, universities and civil society (see Appendix).

On 25th January 2024, a visioning workshop⁸ brought together 24 stakeholders from the built environment industry, environmental sustainability and government to visualise pathways for a socially just transition in Athens' built environment. The results of the research and the visioning workshop are summarised in this report.



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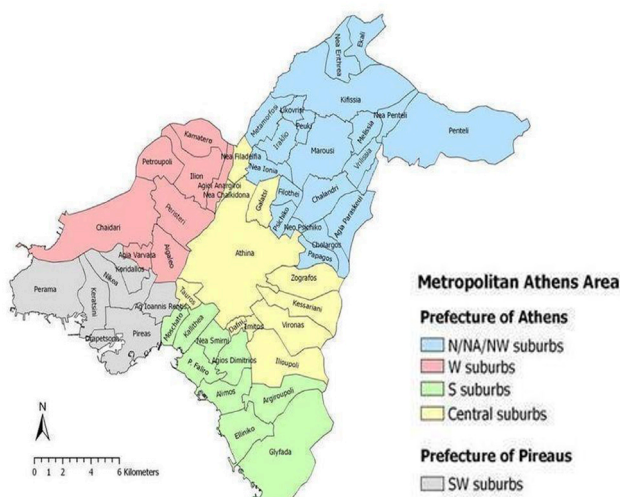
ATHENS: AN OVERVIEW

Over the past century, Athens has grown to become one of the largest cities in Europe. In that same period, Greece has offered sanctuary to waves of people fleeing violence and instability elsewhere, including ethnic Greeks from Turkey in the first half of the twentieth century, half a million Albanians since the 1990s,⁹ and the arrival of over a million refugees from the Middle East and Africa in the mid-2010s, a portion of whom remain in the country, particularly concentrated in Athens.¹⁰ From 2009-2018, Greece also weathered the storm of a deep economic crisis, which precipitated a brain drain of over half a million people, mostly the young and highly educated.¹¹ From a population of 470,000 in 1923, the Greater Athens urban area today counts around 3.7 million residents¹² (1/3 of the population of Greece).

While only 650,000 people live in the Municipality of Athens, like many large cities, it has outgrown its initial municipal boundaries, and Greater Athens, also referred to as the Metropolitan Athens Area, functions as a single and continuous urban area (Figure 1). The Decentralised Administration of Attica Region is a new regional administrative body that governs the capital city of Athens and the surrounding area.¹³

Among the principal challenges facing Athens today is adapting to climate change in a socially inclusive and economically just way. Athens is one of the hottest cities in Europe, and summer temperatures in 2023 peaked at 45.4°C.¹⁴ Wildfires in summer and flash floods in autumn have become increasingly common and the lack of earthquake proofing of older buildings is a major threat in one of the world's most seismically active countries.

FIGURE 1: METROPOLITAN ATHENS



MAIN CLIMATE ACTIONS

Greece has introduced a series of national, regional and local climate adaptation plans. At the national level, the Ministry of Environment and Energy launched the **National Adaptation Strategy for Climate Change**, which has a 10-year implementation horizon and seeks to enhance the country's resilience to the impacts of climate change.¹⁵ It identifies the energy sector among 15 critical areas, advocating for smart networks for efficient demand management, safety measures in energy infrastructure planning, and vulnerability assessments for energy networks and facilities. The 13 regions of Greece have created **Regional Adaptation Action Plans (RAAPs)**, tailoring national objectives to local vulnerabilities, priorities and needs.¹⁶ Although the national plan does not take an explicit human rights approach,¹⁷ it does so implicitly by focusing on protecting vulnerable populations, promoting equitable access to resources, and enhancing transparency and accountability in governance. However, the regional plans have been criticised for lacking specificity in goals and measures, as well as tools and support for their implementation – on top of local authorities being underfunded and understaffed.¹⁸

The **Athenian Resilience Strategy**¹⁹ includes actions such as increasing green spaces through vertical greening, employing sustainable materials for cooler pavements and bioclimatic design, public campaigns to raise awareness about heat risks, and the establishment of a sustainable and equitable energy system. The strategy also aims to promote residents' well-being and improve quality of life through climate change adaptations. This plan is aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and includes aims such as:

- becoming more transparent and accountable through effective communication, the use of open data and the co-creation of public spaces;
- providing online case management systems for social services and the introduction of multi-service municipal centres, which offer both social and health services;
- fostering a culture of collaboration and civic engagement, with greater outreach to CSOs, NGOs, universities, and private sector partners related to greening the city and encouraging entrepreneurship.

The strategy embeds social considerations by aiming to protect vulnerable populations, such as migrants, the homeless and the unemployed, from future shocks and stressors (such as extreme heat and earthquakes).

HUMAN RIGHTS RISKS²⁰ AND OPPORTUNITIES

The long-term impacts of the 2009-2018 financial crisis is a major theme in Greek society and policy-making. Austerity has dramatically reduced financial and human capital due to an unprecedented brain drain creating skills and labour shortages. This combined with a decline in the already weak data on civic engagement and political participation. Furthermore, as a result of the crisis, many households have extremely limited financial means, which is a challenge to maintaining and renovating Greece's ageing housing stock.

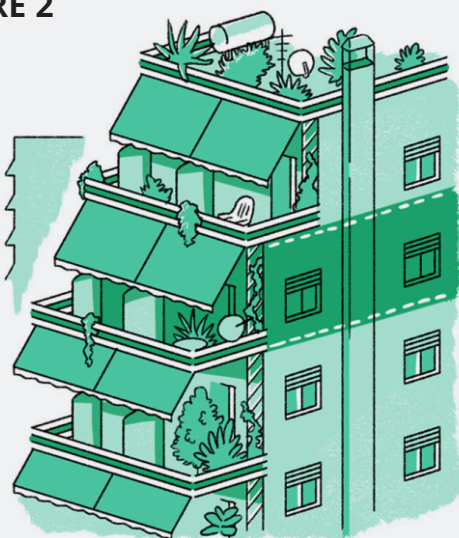
The following sections examine the human rights challenges and opportunities that Athens has in pursuing a green transition in its built environment. Greece's national government, the Decentralised Administration of Attica and the City of Athens municipality all have the responsibility to protect human rights. Likewise, built environment businesses and financial actors have the responsibility to respect human rights in their operations and business decisions. The study analysed these dynamics in Athens in four thematic areas: the right to housing, the right to non-discrimination and spatial equity, construction workers' rights, and the right to participate in decision-making.

THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING²¹

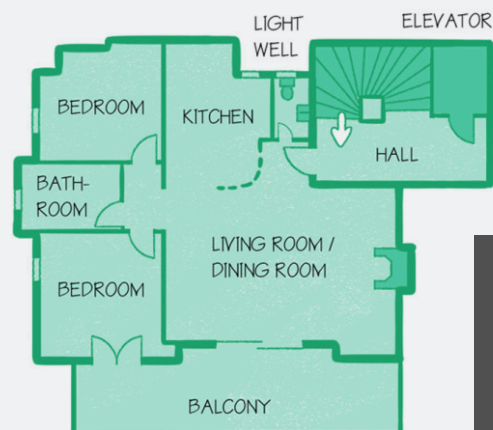
Greece has international legal obligations under its ratification of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) which includes the protection to the right to housing. However, Greece does not have social housing or a policy framework to provide affordable housing. The housing sector is totally unregulated and left to the private market that is empirically failing to deliver affordable or decent quality housing on its own. Furthermore, there is no tradition of social, public or non-profit housing in the country, and there continues to be no competent body assigned to housing policy.²² Trying to fill this gap, family networks and the church provide support to those who cannot access housing on the private market.²³

Indeed, throughout the post-WW2 period, the Greek state has had very limited involvement in housing policy. Affordable housing was provided through a bottom-up market mechanism called *antiparochi*, or 'mutual exchange'. Under *antiparochi*, individuals exchanged their land or existing houses with (typically small-scale) developers, who built blocks and reimbursed the owner with several apartments in return. These apartment blocks, called *polykatoikies*, today form the basis of Greece's urban fabric and were crucial to establishing a property-owning middle class in the country.²⁴

FIGURE 2



POLIKATOIKIA



A rendering of a typical *polikatoikia* facade and apartment floor plan. Illustrator: Josh Kramer/ Bloomberg CityLab. Source: Bloomberg City Lab Design news article: 'Behind the Accidentally Resilient Design of Athens Apartments' (2020)



Development in Athens has climate justice as a pretext, but just leads to price increases which aren't mitigated by policies to protect housing rights. Where 'green' renovations happen, apartment prices increase."

— Architect

The *antiparochi* urban development method resulted in 73% of Greeks owning their homes, one of the highest rates in Europe.²⁵ While the role of developers is often criticised, it is worth noting that these actors historically delivered affordable home ownership across Greek society through this method. However, reforms to tax regulations, along with concerns about urban sprawl and the destruction of remaining architectural heritage in urban areas, led to the decline of the *antiparochi* system in the 2000s.

Many stakeholders raised housing affordability as an overwhelming issue for Athenians. Greece has some of the least affordable rents in the EU relative to income: 79% of tenants are financially overburdened by housing costs (spending more than 40% of disposable income on rent), versus an EU average of 22%.²⁶ Housing and rent prices in Athens have increased due to gentrification, driven by the rapid growth of tourism, large numbers of short-term rentals, and overseas investors buying (often through the 'Golden Visa' programme)²⁷ 'cheap'²⁸ housing after the financial crisis. Such investors seek to extract rents for a highly-profitable ROI (return on investment) which is becoming increasingly controversial in Greek politics.²⁹

During the interviews and the visioning workshop, concerns were raised about price increases following energy efficiency renovations of ageing *polykatoikies*. Participants also wondered how these renovations can be funded, given the lack of disposable income of many households and the limited resources of the state. The EXOIKONOMO programme is a key effort by the government to enhance the energy efficiency of residential buildings, offering financial incentives for energy-saving renovations.³⁰ It has been successful in reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, but it predominantly benefits property

owners with sufficient financial means to invest in the renovations (grants of up to 75% of costs are available). This leaves behind owners with more limited means, and also renters who may experience rent increases following the building upgrades. Stakeholders called for expanded funding, reduced bureaucracy and legal protections for renters to ensure a fairer distribution of benefits from EXOIKONOMO.

SPATIAL JUSTICE: THE RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION APPLIED TO SPACE

While there is a low level of segregation across Athens as a whole, some inner-city neighbourhoods, such as Viktoria, Attiki and Plateia Amerikis, are experiencing spatial segregation³¹ of low-income Greek families and new migrants. This is because the inner-city is home to the oldest *polykatoikies* in the densest neighbourhoods, which typically have greater maintenance requirements.³² As such, there is reduced demand and lower rents, making these apartments more affordable.

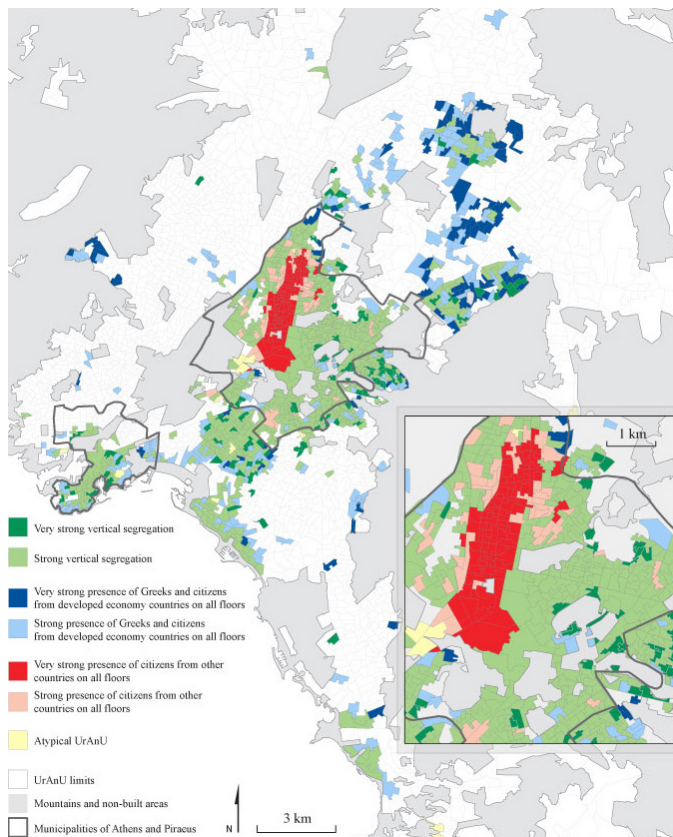
Data from the 2011 census show spatial segregation of migrants and poorer families into a relatively small transect of central Athens. Spatial segregation derives from structural forces such as housing market trends and gentrification impacting the choices available to marginalised groups.³³ Therefore, the realities facing specific communities only able to afford housing in parts of the centre of Athens highlights a social challenge that was noted by stakeholders in the research. At the same time, some commented that the low property prices in low-income areas make these districts increasingly attractive to developers. This results in gentrification and risks displacing marginalised residents, with no social nor affordable housing available elsewhere in the city.



It's not so much the deprived areas that are the issue. Concerning climate change and extreme weather, all Athenians have the right to equal protection against impacts."

— University professor

FIGURE 3: MAP OF CENSUS DATA, SEGREGATED AREAS IN RED³⁴



An additional spatial justice issue is access to green space. The City of Athens is the second most densely populated area in Europe after Paris and is the second least green of all 38 capital cities in the EU-EEA after Valletta.³⁵ Only 11% of the municipality is green space, with just 0.96m² per resident,³⁶ far below the WHO recommendation of 9m².³⁷ These factors contribute to the urban heat island, a major problem as summers become hotter due to climate change. The effect is most intense in the inner-city, where marginalised residents in older buildings are concentrated and there is least access to green space, rather unlike the leafier, less dense suburban areas beyond the boundaries of the City of Athens municipality.³⁸ As such, heat and access to green space are issues with racial and class dimensions. The City of Athens' municipal plan does note issues relating to these inequalities. However, it does not propose specific interventions to address emerging challenges facing communities in particular locations within the city. Also, the plan does not relate these social justice issues to climate change, suggesting the need for further work to link together these issues.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' RIGHTS

Efforts to protect labour rights, particularly in the construction sector, reflect broader economic challenges in Greece, but offer important perspectives on the evolving landscape of employment amidst the green transition. Only 25% of Greek workers are unionised³⁹ and construction workers' unions exhibited a marked reluctance to engage in the research for this study, potentially due to the unpaid nature of their advocacy work, leaving them with limited time for additional commitments. This hesitancy underscores a broader disconnect between the pressing needs of the workforce and the capacity of unions to mobilise effectively under current conditions in which labour rights are being undermined.⁴⁰

The OECD highlights that the shift towards a greener economy will result in significant jobs growth in the construction sector, as well as in manufacturing, transport and distribution.⁴¹ This is particularly the case with respect to energy-efficient renovations under the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, with forecasts projecting over 200,000 direct, 1.6 million indirect, and 1.5 million induced jobs in Greece from 2021 to 2026, the highest projections in the EU.⁴² This indicates a robust demand for skilled labour in green building practices and underscores the sector's potential as a driver of sustainable development.

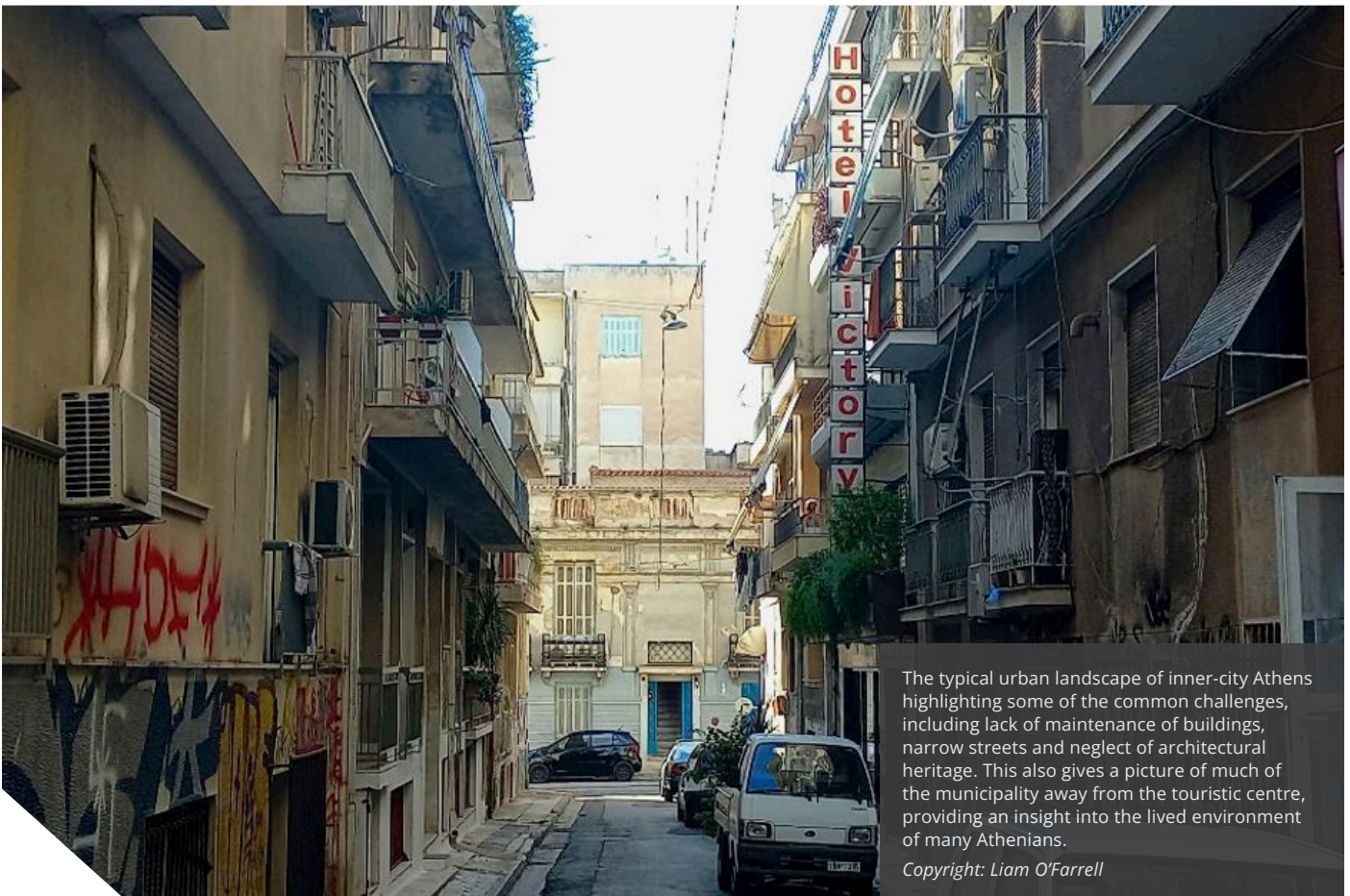
The prevalence of informal employment arrangements in Greece presents a complex challenge, often leaving workers without formal contracts, benefits or protections.⁴³ The negotiation of payment in such environments is fraught with vulnerability, as workers without formal employment status lack the protections and bargaining power afforded by regulatory frameworks. The construction sector is the most unstable in Greece in terms of employment, with a high degree of precarity due to project-based seasonal work. It has the highest concentration of illegal work, which means that workers must negotiate payment and lack benefits such as access to the social security fund.⁴⁴ Such conditions not only undermine workers' rights and safety at work, but also potentially the quality and safety of the construction projects they undertake.⁴⁵

In Greece, there is a shortage of craftspeople, machine operators and construction site engineers, with some 200,000 unfilled positions.⁴⁶ This is particularly concerning given that several billion euros' worth of construction projects are underway, including a new metro line in Athens, motorway constructions, and Ellinikon, the largest urban regeneration project in Europe (see case study box on page 12).⁴⁷ To address these challenges, measures such as skills development, improving job attractiveness, and enhancing labour market activation and matching are crucial.⁴⁸

The Greek government has announced plans to regularise the status of up to 300,000 undocumented migrants to address labour shortages, particularly in the construction and agriculture sectors. However, decent working conditions must also be ensured to effectively address these labour shortages in the long-term.⁴⁹ To leverage green transition employment opportunities and meet the green targets Greece has committed to achieving, governments and businesses have critical roles in protecting and respecting (respectively) decent working conditions in the construction sector.

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making in Greece is highly centralised, with low local autonomy and - despite its history as the birthplace of democracy - low levels of citizens' participation. Local governments in the country rank as having among the lowest autonomy in Europe,⁵⁰ with the OECD recommending greater decentralisation of decision-making in Greece.⁵¹ Stakeholders noted the paucity of opportunities for citizens to shape policies beyond the ballot box and, particularly since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, studies have found a deterioration in the already weak data on citizens' participation.⁵² Compared to elsewhere in Europe, there are very few civil society groups,⁵³ and the limited growth in the role of civil society over the past two decades has had a top-down approach, mainly as a result of EU funding and organisation by left-wing political parties.⁵⁴ However, other researchers suggest that, rather than a formalised civil society comprising CSOs and organised engagement mechanisms, civic



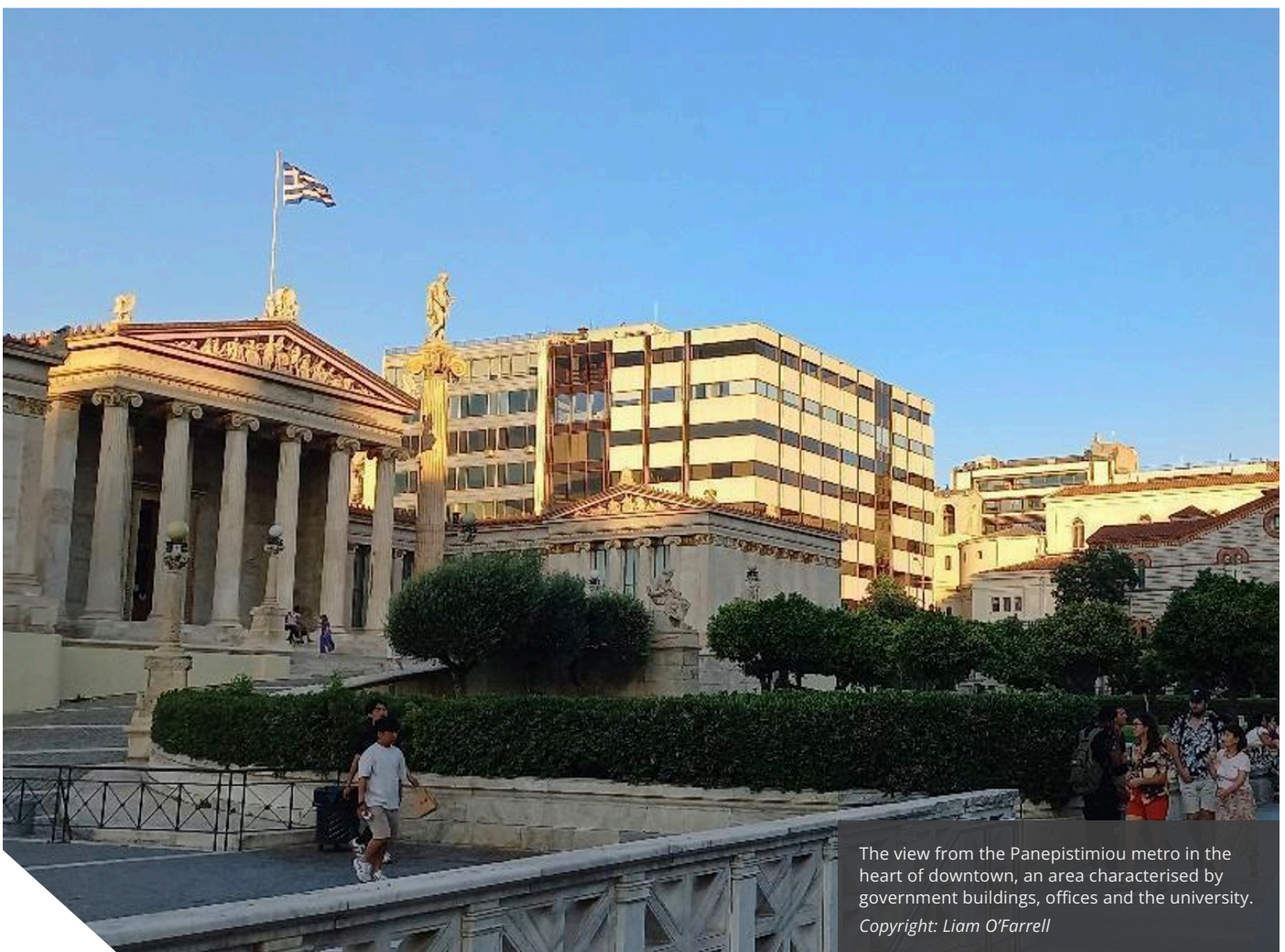
The typical urban landscape of inner-city Athens highlighting some of the common challenges, including lack of maintenance of buildings, narrow streets and neglect of architectural heritage. This also gives a picture of much of the municipality away from the touristic centre, providing an insight into the lived environment of many Athenians.

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engagement in Greece tends to be informal and relies upon personal contacts, which in turn generates risks of clientelism and nepotism.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, there is evidence of positive developments with regards to civic engagement in Greece. The *synAthena* platform is a government-led hub for civic engagement launched in 2013 'geared towards problem identification, problem-solving and political reform', filling a civic engagement gap and launching hundreds of projects across the city,⁵⁶ from organising to clean litter and graffiti to projects working towards the inclusion of marginalised groups. One of Europe's first municipal platforms for participatory decision-making, *synAthena* has been commended by the OECD as a pioneering example of public sector innovation.⁵⁷ This platform was also highlighted in the visioning workshop as an important tool for citizens' participation that has been underused in recent years, but is one that participants hope will be maximised in the future.

Moreover, as several stakeholders commented, the influence of the EU might stimulate the emergence of a culture of citizens' participation. One noted the growing importance of civic engagement in climate policies at an EU level, which they felt has not yet taken root in Greece. Several stakeholders referenced the climate policy successes of Ireland's Citizens' Assembly⁵⁸ as an example that Greece could learn from. It was suggested that barriers to the use of such methods in Greece are a lack of digital skills (for online engagement platforms), a general lack of awareness of new civic engagement methods, and a shortage of skilled public officials owing to austerity measures. However, with digitalisation now a priority for the Greek government, some of these barriers may be overcome in the medium-term.



The view from the Panepistimiou metro in the heart of downtown, an area characterised by government buildings, offices and the university.
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LOCAL CASE STUDY: ELLINIKON PROJECT

Ellinikon is a new 8-billion-euro private investment to develop a 'smart' and 'green' city on the Athens Riviera, constituting the largest urban regeneration project in Europe. The plan is to build over the site of the former Athens International Airport a mixed-used complex, twice the size of New York City's Central Park. Ellinikon will include luxury hotels, a resort casino, a commercial hub with entertainment and the largest shopping mall in Greece, health and wellness facilities, schools, and sports amenities. It will also include a marina for large yachts and a 2,000,000 sq.m park to connect residents to nature.⁵⁹ The masterplan was created by Foster + Partners,⁶⁰ the design of the Park Rise residences by BIG⁶¹ and the low-carbon concrete is provided by Holcim.⁶² The 'Little Athens' neighbourhood is planned to host 1,100 future residents.

Environmental aspects

The project is advertised as 'smart and sustainable' using the latest technological advances and the highest sustainability building standards. The environmental objectives of the project include: 'net-zero embodied and operational carbon emissions, climate resilience by mapping climate risks, minimise air and noise pollution, restore and regenerate natural ecosystems, maximise water efficiency, responsibly source materials, and design out waste'.⁶³ It is also planned to be a '15-minute city' to encourage walking and cycling. Regarding construction, the low carbon concrete promises to emit 30% less CO₂ emissions, and also some infrastructure from Athens's former airport will be recycled and repurposed.⁶⁴

Social aspects

Regarding the social aspects of the project, according to Lamda, the developer, 'the sustainable design will offer world-class services and amenities while improving the standard of living of inhabitants across the entire Attica area'.⁶⁵ The social objectives of the project are lofty and ambitious: 'create employment, skills and learning opportunities; to develop and support opportunities to reduce inequalities, promote diversity and enhance accessibility; maximise health, safety, and wellbeing; and to develop infrastructure to enhance the natural, cultural, and historic environment for society and the local community.'

Risks and opportunities

This project, especially due to its size, poses a number of human rights risks and opportunities:

- 'Athenians fear this huge new development will turn into a "mini Dubai" – a seaside oasis for the rich' and that average Athenians will not enjoy its full benefits.⁶⁶
- Regarding housing, there will be '65 building zones that create distinct neighbourhoods covering every need',⁶⁷ which implies a sense of diversification of housing and income levels, although the level of affordability is still to be seen.
- Property purchases are advertised within the Golden Visa scheme for buying property in Greece with a minimum of 250,000-500,000 euros, depending on location.⁶⁸ A similar scheme was in place in Portugal (2012-2023) but the government ended it because it inflated housing prices and exacerbated the affordability crisis, hindering social equity.⁶⁹
- Regarding civic infrastructure, the project will deliver various luxurious facilities, and some infrastructure in the areas of culture, health and education, however accessibility and the degree of their social value remains unclear, especially when it is all privatised, e.g. whether the 'health and wellness facilities' will be gyms and luxury spas, or a hospital accessible to residents of nearby neighbourhoods.
- The scale of the Ellinikon development, in the context of the Golden Visa programme and rapidly increasing property prices in Athens, presents a risk that the project exacerbates unaffordability and is tailored only to the rich.

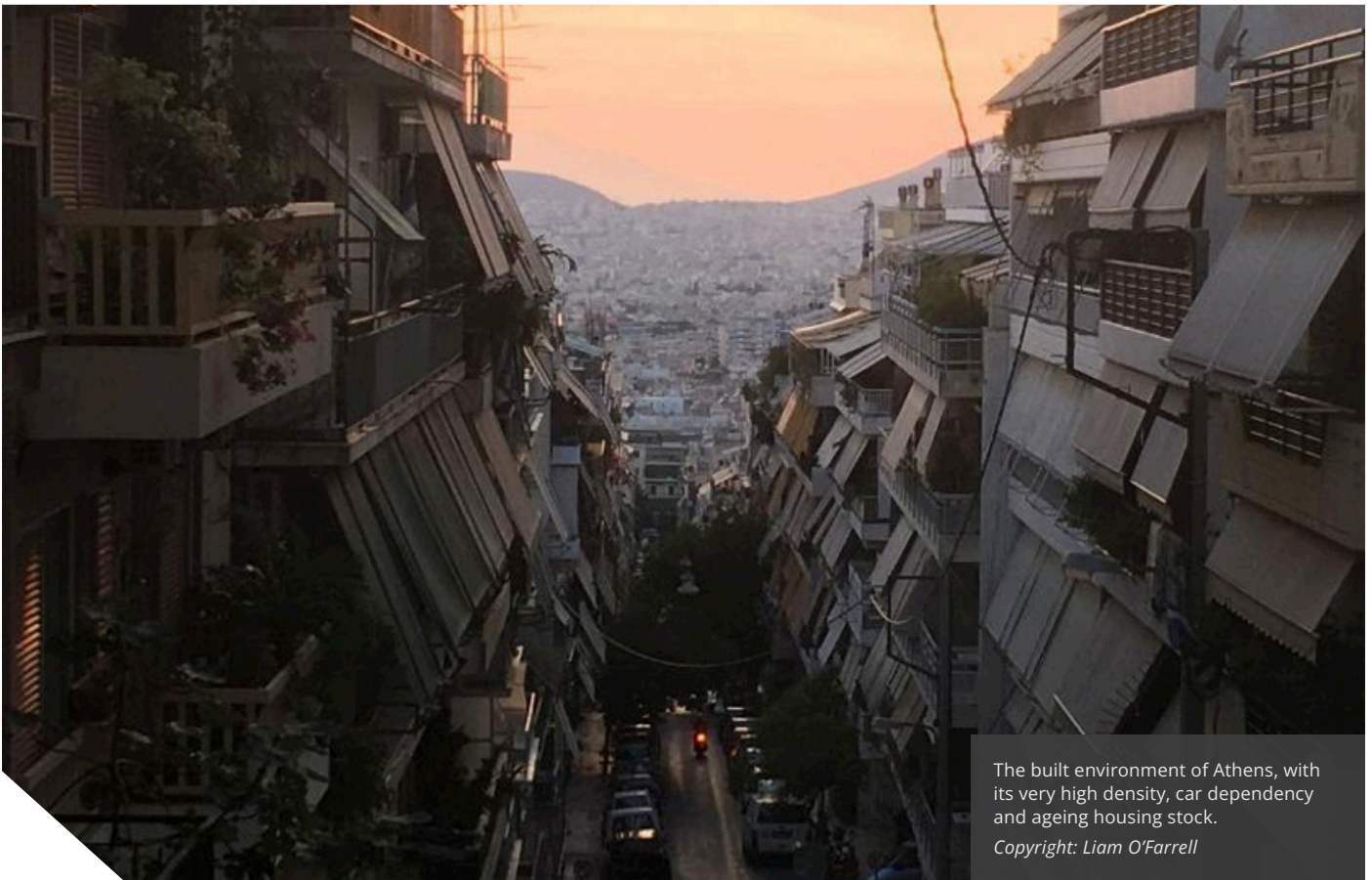
For these reasons it is essential that the Ellinikon project respects and enables the right to housing, and seeks to reduce social and spatial inequalities rather than exacerbate them. Also, it is important that it respects the rights of construction workers, and that it integrates mechanisms for local communities surrounding the project to participate in decision-making. In this way the project will be truly environmentally and socially sustainable.

CONCLUSION

Athens is at the start of its journey in decarbonising and embedding climate resilience into its buildings and infrastructure. One of Europe's largest cities, Athens is also among its densest and least green, recording some of the highest temperatures on the continent as well as growing incidences of summer wildfires and autumn flash floods. Compounding these challenges is the recent legacy of the deep economic crisis in Greece, which led to a huge contraction of the economy and a collapse in the financial and human resources available for action, with many workshop participants talking about '15 lost years' in which urban and economic development ground to a halt.

Nevertheless, Athens has the potential to adapt to the challenges it faces. An existing strength, that deserves greater attention, is the relatively high degree of social integration compared to many other European cities. Hence, Athens' diversity and integration are potentially some of the greatest strengths of the city, presenting opportunities for increased social cohesion in the future.

Greece is now posting strong economic growth rates and attracting record foreign investment, along with the largest Recovery and Resilience Plan funding in the EU relative to the size of the national economy. These investments have already sparked new building projects which promise to be transformative for Athens, ranging from landmark new transport infrastructure to the largest urban regeneration project in Europe, Ellinikon. Local authorities along with urban planners of these developments should ensure access for those most vulnerable, due to low incomes, migration status and other factors, as well as ensuring construction workers' rights are respected. Ultimately, urban transformations present valuable opportunities to build a more inclusive and sustainable city.



The built environment of Athens, with its very high density, car dependency and ageing housing stock.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are grouped by the alliances needed to achieve them. Diverse sectors must work together and collaborate in the pursuit of the suggested actions.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Create a 'Ministry of Housing and Sustainable Urban Development' to provide clear policy and direction to address the growing housing crisis in the country. This new ministry should develop policy and operational mechanisms, along with adequate financial resources to realise the right to adequate housing, such as rent caps or requirements to include social and/or affordable housing components in new projects or redevelopments.⁷⁰
 - Ministry of Economy and Finance (in collaboration with the proposed ministry above): incentivise housing renovations through the tax system to ensure it benefits low-income landlords and protects tenants. This includes introducing requirements for the use of sustainable materials in development and expanding the EXOIKONOMO programme to include renters and homeowners with more limited financial means.
 - Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance: increase the frequency of construction site inspections to ensure the use of legal employment and safe working practices, as well as collaboration or incentivisation of skills training with employers in the sector.
- to mitigate gentrification and ensure that diverse communities can thrive within the city.
 - Promote heritage conservation: maintain, further develop and apply more consistently the current policies aimed at preserving Athens' cultural and historical heritage. This would help balance modern development needs with the protection of significant cultural and historical sites.
- The Decentralised Administration of Attica region: the need for integrated, staffed and funded urban planning policies across Greater Athens was identified as a challenge. Stakeholders were unsure about the competencies of the new devolved administration, or even how to contact it. Improved communications would be beneficial, such as using social media, an online platform, and events to promote in-person engagement with stakeholders in local government and agencies in each municipality across the Greater Athens urban area.
 - The General Directorate for Technical Works and Projects (ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΤΕΧΝΙΚΩΝ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΡΓΩΝ)
 - Expand green spaces, which is vital to tackle the urban heat island effect. This could involve converting abandoned buildings and vacant land in the middle of blocks into parks and community gardens, and building more 'pocket parks' around the city, with citizens' input to identify appropriate sites.
 - Encourage private investment in empty and derelict buildings to build regulated affordable housing through tax breaks and expedited permits in a public-private partnership inspired by the *antiparochi* system. The first step would be to identify and catalogue abandoned buildings and create an accessible database of them, similar to the examples from Brussels: the *Locay* platform developed by Endeavour⁷¹, *Stadsmakersfonds* from Miss Miyagi⁷² and *Te her bestem men*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- City of Athens municipality:
 - Implement equitable zoning policies: adopt zoning policies that encourage mixed-use developments and affordable housing units

(To Be Repurposed)⁷³. This should be done in coordination with the General Directorate of Economic Affairs (ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΩΝ).

- Enhance public transportation: improve and expand public transit systems to reduce reliance on private vehicles, decrease emissions and ensure accessibility for all citizens. Especially, work to promote wheelchair accessibility in public transport and to create and maintain in good state accessible pavements (Citizen groups are campaigning for pavements across the city to be built and/or maintained, because those in wheelchairs or with pushchairs simply cannot move safely around the city as pedestrians).⁷⁴
 - Resilient Infrastructure: upgrade and maintain infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events and climate change impacts, ensuring the continuity of services.
- General Directorate of Economic Affairs (ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΩΝ):
 - Increase transparency: all participants agreed on the need for greater transparency on how and where public funds are used and distributed, as well as consistent evaluation of spending, with relevant reports available online for citizens.
 - Support local businesses and job creation: foster economic growth and employment opportunities through support for small businesses and skills training programs, particularly in green jobs. One practical mechanism for supporting local businesses is through adapting procurement policies and using supply chains that guarantee local employment and standards relating to workers' rights.⁷⁵
 - Create a General Directorate of Citizen Engagement to implement the following:
 - Greater engagement with technical experts (scientists in universities, for instance)

and experts by experience (citizens facing particular issues) with a focus on implementation⁷⁶. This research also found a need for continuity of long-term plans that are inclusive, collaborative and have appropriate budgets and staffing levels.

- Roll out digital skills training and introduce staff exchanges with other municipalities across the EU to share knowledge on best practices, which could help build confidence in applying new methods, such as in citizens' engagement. Funding for staff exchanges is available under the EU's MSCA programme, and municipalities in Greece can join project consortia with other municipalities, universities and businesses across Europe to bid for funding, helping to mitigate challenges relating to the cost of such exchanges.⁷⁷
- Leverage the synAthina platform to connect, engage and understand citizens' and CSOs' needs and concerns. This would also increase public support and enhance perceptions of transparency and accountability in decision-making.

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

- Construction companies: foster a more cooperative and understanding relationship with trade unions by creating channels for compensated, structured and constructive engagement that considers unions' time and resource limitations. Construction firms also need to be more robust in their processes relating to legal status of workers and commit to ensuring that workers are legally employed, paid and taxed, rather than being hired on an informal, casual or cash-in-hand basis.
- Public and private banks: preferential lending conditions should incorporate further environmental and social criteria, rather than the existing superficial ESG commitments. One example could be preferential conditions for built environment projects (and the companies

that run them) that demonstrate greater energy efficiency, a minimum proportion of social housing in the newly-built or renovated building, or when the project can demonstrate increased social value to the community. To this end, developers seeking finance would ideally commit to undertaking greater civic engagement with communities around the sites of proposed developments.

- Public and private planning agencies: make greater use of participatory planning, for example developers working with civil society organisations and academics to design more environmentally and socially sustainable developments.
- All built environment stakeholders: Greater consideration of the human rights impacts of urban development and policies would lead to more just outcomes in Athens. This is particularly important given the current lack of consideration of the impacts upon marginalised groups, as well as ongoing labour rights issues. Given the scale of development planned for Athens - including Ellinikon, the largest urban regeneration project in Europe - the adoption of the human rights-centred 'Dignity by Design' framework⁷⁸ can create a culture of practice that prioritises addressing these issues in current and future projects.

APPENDIX

This project counted with the valuable contributions of these persons and organisations through research interviews and conversations about the just transition in Athens:

1. Co-Founder at Commonsplace
2. Professor at National Technical University of Athens (School of Mining, Engineering and Metallurgy)
3. Managing Partner at Global Challenges Sustainability Advisors
4. Creative Director at Hellenic Properties
5. Research Associate at National Technical University of Athens (Energy Policy Unit)
6. Head of Capital Markets at Colliers International Group
7. President at Hellenic Property Federation
8. Co-Founder at ECUALab
9. Professor at National Technical University of Athens (School of Architecture)
10. Programme Director at C40 Cities
11. Project Manager at UrbanDig Project
12. Researcher at EKKE, Ministry of Development and Investment
13. General Manager at Hellenic Association of Independent Power Companies
14. Co-Founder at Kollektiva



The picture showcases an iconic landmark of the city but from a different perspective. The inclusion of trees symbolises the focus on environmental issues, and the dark clouds over the Acropolis can be thought of as symbolically representing the challenges facing the city.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The ILO just transition advocacy focuses on the impact of transition processes –exit of carbon intensive industries– on workers' rights
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- 7 The concept of a '15-minute city' refers to an urban design model where residents can access all their daily needs, such as work, education, healthcare, shopping and leisure activities, within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes. The idea is to create more compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods that prioritise proximity and accessibility, reducing the reliance on cars and promoting sustainability, community interaction, and quality of life. See Carlos Moreno new book 'The 15-Minute City' for more information: <https://www.moreno-web.net/new-book-the-15-minute-city-a-solution-to-saving-our-time-and-our-planet/>
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- 20 UN human rights experts have noted that Greece is imposing restrictions on civil society organisations. This brings concerns about Greece's failure to respect international human rights standards regarding freedom of association and expression. Since the scope of this paper is the human rights implications of climate actions in the built environment, these issues are not discussed in detail. For further information see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/16/un-expert-slams-greece-over-civil-society-curbs>
- 21 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Housing/Homelessness/CSOs/20151027-TEIA_Greece.pdf
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- 24 Antiparochi is credited as having created a middle class where none existed before, basically as farmers or those living in small old houses swapped their land for 3-4 new apartments in a modern block, some of which they could rent out or give to family members who then had an affordable way of moving to the city from the countryside.

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- 27 <https://migration.gov.gr/en/golden-visa/>
- 28 This housing it is unaffordable for local residents but seems like a bargain to those from overseas where income is typically much higher, and therefore they have a higher purchasing power than locals
- 29 Companies involved in these sectors (tourism and real estate investment) have clear human rights responsibilities to make sure their actions or inactions do not harm people's rights in any way. Likewise, the Greek government holds the duty to protect against such harms to vulnerable people, from tourism and real estate businesses.
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- 73 <https://www.teherbestemmen.be>
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- 75 For more information, see publication below by the lead author of this report (Liam O'Farrell and two colleagues) which is based on a 3-year project working with a university, hospital and city council to change their procurement processes to be more just (including commitments to workers' rights and paying a living wage from suppliers) and to focus on procuring only from local businesses as much as possible. See: O'Farrell, L., Hassan S. and Hoole, C. (2022) 'The university as a just anchor: universities, anchor networks and participatory research', *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(12), pp.2405-2416. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2022.2072480>
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