

# Greece 2023 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Greece during the past year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of prison detainees and of migrants and asylum seekers by law enforcement authorities; crimes involving violence targeting members of national, racial, or ethnic minority groups; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons.

The government regularly took steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government. There were, however, complaints from nongovernmental organizations and international organizations regarding government failures to effectively investigate allegations of forced returns of asylum seekers and to hold those responsible to account.

## Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

### a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or

## **Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The constitution and law prohibited such practices. There were reports, however, of mistreatment and abuse by police and the coast guard, including against members of racial and ethnic minority groups, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, demonstrators, and Roma.

On March 11, the Ministry for Citizen Protection reported the arrest of four police officers on accusations of “torture and other offenses of human dignity” after they allegedly beat a prisoner during transit between correctional facilities.

Local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and media reported cases of law enforcement authorities allegedly abusing undocumented migrants and asylum seekers during deterrence and

pushback operations at Greece-Türkiye land and sea borders, as well as at preremoval centers and detention facilities. NGOs advocated for the establishment of an independent government agency to investigate violence and other alleged abuses. NGOs argued that despite UN and EU reports and the January 2023 *Interim Report of the Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns* under the National Commission for Human Rights, the country had not effectively investigated pushback claims. The government disputed the need for any additional investigating body. The government asserted existing safeguards were sufficient, including the justice system, the National Transparency Authority, and the Fundamental Rights Officer and Special Committee for Compliance with Fundamental Rights in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

NGOs and international organizations reported authorities beat migrants and asylum seekers and took identity documents, personal effects, and money. Some reports claimed authorities left migrants and asylum seekers stranded in the Aegean Sea or in the Evros land border region without access to food, water, or medical care.

On March 6, Spanish newspaper *El País* published an analysis of 374 pushback incidents involving Greek security forces on the Evros border with Türkiye. The incidents allegedly occurred between 2017 and 2022 and involved more than 20,000 persons who were forced back over the border soon after they crossed. The article stated security forces confiscated more

than €2 million (\$2.16 million), cell phones, and other valuables. The article also said 92 percent of individuals pushed back in 2022 reported having been victims of theft.

In February the Border Violence Monitoring Network, a consortium of 12 NGOs across Europe, reported findings based on interviews of 50 detainees in Greek preremoval centers. Of those interviewed, 65 percent alleged they experienced or witnessed violence by authorities. About 25 percent claimed authorities used physical violence, including use of tasers, as a form of coercion or punishment.

On May 19, the *New York Times* published an April 11 video allegedly showing the Hellenic Coast Guard moving 12 migrants and asylum seekers including small children from a van into a raft, taking them out to sea, and abandoning them. On May 22, Prime Minister Mitsotakis said authorities opened an investigation.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison and detention centers remained overcrowded, often with inadequate sanitation or health care. In January main opposition member of parliament and shadow Migration Minister Giorgos Psychogios denounced “deteriorating conditions” in preremoval centers that he attributed to a lack of crucial health and social services. In August the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment released a report based on its November 2022 visit to the Korydallos Psychiatric Hospital for Prisoners. The report noted “overcrowded and dilapidated” rooms with no “genuine occupational therapy activities” and insufficient medical staff for the 170 patients. For the period 2022-3, the government implemented a special program, worth €24 million (\$25.9 million) and targeting 7,000 beneficiaries, to enhance detainees’ future reintegration.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** July government statistics indicated the prison population slightly exceeded holding capacity. Violent incidents among detainees continued to decline and there were no reported fatalities. Some migrants and asylum seekers detained by Hellenic Police and Coast Guard alleged inhuman or degrading detention conditions. On March 21, media reported at least 11 migrants and asylum seekers at the Paranesti preremoval center in Drama, northern Greece, had been on a hunger strike since March 16, protesting prolonged detention, inadequate conditions, and repeated police violence. The hunger strike ended March 25.

**Administration:** Independent authorities investigated allegations of mistreatment in prisons.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted independent nongovernmental observers to monitor prison and detention center conditions. Authorities required NGOs, diplomatic missions, and foreign and domestic journalists to submit requests in advance of each visit to closed-

and controlled-access facilities, reception and identification facilities, and official migrant and asylum-seeker camps.

**Improvements:** In accordance with a 2022 law, the government established a legal remedy for complaints about detention conditions.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and laws prohibited arbitrary arrest and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements. On January 25, opposition member of parliament Psychogios said the number of administrative detainees in the preremoval detention in his district increased 500 percent since 2019. He said authorities detained survivors of an October 2022 shipwreck in Kythera for more than three months.

In September media announced an Afghan national convicted and imprisoned for three years on allegations of human smuggling would receive €16,000 (\$17,280) as compensation for wrongful detention. The ombudsperson, through the National Preventive Mechanism for the Investigation of Arbitrary Incidents, received 210 complaints in 2022, most about police insults to human integrity, health, or freedom. The ombudsperson's July report noted that despite fewer forced returns of foreign nationals, the number of administrative detainees in preremoval detention centers and police stations remained high. The ombudsperson

noted authorities detained foreign nationals who had no reasonable prospect of return.

## **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and required judicial warrants for arrests, except during the commission of a crime. The law required detainees be promptly informed of the charges against them at their first court appearance. The law required police to bring detainees before a magistrate, who should issue a detention warrant or order the detainee's release within 24 hours. There was a functioning bail system as well as other options for release pending trial. Detainees were allowed prompt access to a lawyer of their choice, or one provided by the state. The law provided for the latter after a person was formally charged with a criminal offense rather than from the outset of custody.

These rights were generally respected. Indigent defendants facing felony charges received legal representation from the bar association. NGOs and international organizations provided limited legal aid to detained migrants and asylum seekers.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, and the

government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. On July 5, media reported the government withdrew its challenge of the European Court of Human Rights' ruling that the country violated Andreas Georgiou's right to a fair trial when the Court of Cassation failed to justify its refusal to refer his question to the EU Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling. Georgiou, the former president of the Hellenic Statistical Authority, was charged with breach of duty in 2015.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

### **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

NGOs and advocacy groups reported the country did not make significant progress on resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens, despite existing property restitution laws and mechanisms. The Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece, a public law

entity, claimed more than 100 properties owned by Jews before the war continued to be occupied as government facilities. The government had a committee of appointees and representatives of the Central Jewish Council to negotiate the disposition of remaining properties, but there were no new decisions on the ownership of disputed properties.

The Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* to Congress, released publicly in July 2020, can be found on the Department's website at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

## **h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution and law prohibited such actions with certain conditions; there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions. For example, the law permitted breaches of citizen privacy if preauthorized by both a public prosecutor and an appeals court prosecutor. In December 2022, the government passed a bill providing a two-year prison sentence for the use, sale, or distribution of spyware. A May report from the European Parliament's Committee of Inquiry on the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware (PEGA) found the country did not use spyware "as part of an integral authoritarian strategy," but applied spyware against "journalists, politicians and businesspersons," and exported spyware

to countries with poor human rights records. During the year, there were no new reports of instances of the use of spyware.

During the year, Artemis Seaford, a former Meta employee with dual Greek and U.S. citizenship who, according to a March 20 *New York Times* report, worked on cybersecurity policy issues, alleged she was monitored by the National Intelligence Service via Predator spyware on her mobile phone from September to November 2021. Opposition and international press outlets argued the pattern of evidence implicated the country's authorities.

In July the Hellenic Data Protection Authority presented findings suggesting that in 2022 at least 92 Greek citizens had been subjected to attempts to install Predator spyware on their personal devices. The authority said it did not have data pointing to the origin of these attempts, but added the investigation remained ongoing.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of

expression, including for members of the press. Domestic and international agencies, however, said journalists and media outlets faced pressure to avoid criticizing the government or reporting scandals.

On January 12, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, urged authorities to ensure "human rights defenders and journalists could work safely and freely." In May a report by Reporters Without Borders cited concerns about wiretapping of journalists, allegedly by the intelligence agencies and by means of the Predator spyware, concentration of media ownership, government control of public media, and violence against journalists, primarily those covering protests and migration.

**Freedom of Expression:** The constitution and law protected freedom of expression but allowed restrictions on speech inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups based on their race, skin color, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. Defamation remained a criminal offense.

**Violence and Harassment:** On July 13, the Journalists' Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers expressed to Minister of Justice Floridis the need to protect journalists against legal harassment known as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). The European Commission defined SLAPPs in November as lawsuits lodged against journalists or human rights defenders to prevent them from informing the public and reporting on matters of public interest. On March 14, the country's member of the

European Parliament, Stelios Kouloglou, raised the issue of SLAPPs with the European Commission, citing the example of the mayor of Alexandroupolis targeting journalist and trade union activist Antonis Telopoulos with retaliatory lawsuits.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other**

**Media, Including Online Media:** The government did not censor media although many NGOs said major outlets tended not to publish unflattering news about the government, including allegations of human rights violations, impeding informed civic participation. In August the Council of State – the highest administrative court – requested the EU Court of Justice decide whether the National Radio and Television Council (NRTC) had the authority to fine websites for “violations of human dignity” as it did with radio and TV. The Council of State ruled web-based television services were not obliged to abide by national radio and television regulations and therefore the NRTC could not fine them.

National television and radio media service providers had to register with the NRTC. The government also maintained a register of accredited local websites that were required to display their certification on their homepage. A similar electronic registry was in place for regional and local press.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The law provided criminal penalties for conviction of defamation, including libel and slander. Individuals convicted of crimes could not claim slander for discussion of their crimes. Media freedom

watchdogs continued to raise concerns about the use of such laws to intimidate journalists. In her March report, the UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders noted journalists faced “criminal lawsuits and strategic lawsuits against public participation for their investigative reporting on corruption and environmental pollution.”

**Nongovernmental Impact:** On April 28, police arrested two suspects in connection with the 2021 killing of journalist George Karaivaz, who had been reporting on organized crime and corruption.

In May and June, police arrested 10 individuals, including suspected members of the Golden Dawn party, on allegations of attacking an exhibition by North Macedonian artist Sergei Andreevski in Kalamaria, northern Greece. The masked suspects allegedly stormed into the exhibition, forced the artist to take down his works, and denied access to visitors. In their leaflets, Golden Dawn supporters decried the granting of public space to an artist originating from a country they argued “undermines” and “falsifies” Greek history.

**Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media:** The government enacted legislation to require proof of a tangible effect to charge someone with spreading disinformation.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor

online content. There were reports authorities misused surveillance technology to monitor mobile devices of specific individuals.

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some restrictions.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The law provided for freedom of peaceful assembly, and the government generally respected this right. On March 4, media reported violent clashes between police and demonstrators during a rally in response to a February train crash in Tempi. Some demonstrators threw incendiary devices at police, who then responded with tear gas and stun grenades in what critics argued was an overreaction. Police said demonstrators also caused damage to cars and buildings and argued its response was proportionate.

On March 24, the Hellenic Union for Human and Civil Rights sent an open letter to Minister of Citizen Protection Takis Theodorikakos, the National Mechanism for Investigation of Arbitrary Acts, and the National Human Rights Commission calling on the government to conduct transparent investigations into reports of police violence during demonstrations, including the March 4 clashes in Tempi.

## **Freedom of Association**

Although the constitution and law provided for freedom of association, courts continued to place legal restrictions on associations of self-identified ethnic Macedonians or associations that included the term “Turkish” as indicative of a collective ethnic identity. The Thrace-based “Turkish Union of Xanthi” continued to operate without legal status, based on a 2021 Supreme Court ruling denying its official registration on “national security and public order grounds.”

## **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

## **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing

protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern. Authorities also worked with the European Asylum Support Office. Undocumented individuals waiting to register in the asylum system were informed of their rights and asylum procedures. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) assisted voluntary return programs.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status. The government had a system of providing protection to refugees through an autonomous asylum service and an appeals authority under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Tight deadlines guided each step, and missed deadlines could result in a negative asylum or refugee determination and a deportation order. NGOs said persistent glitches in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum's online platform caused applicants delays receiving protection and care. International organizations, NGOs, and media outlets continued to argue that pushbacks denied potential asylum seekers access to vulnerability assessments and to the asylum process more broadly.

**Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** There were reports of physical abuse and violence by members of the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard against migrants and asylum seekers during pushback operations. In its January interim report, the Recording Mechanism of Incidents of Informal Forced Returns, a body convened under the National Commission for Human Rights and composed of several NGOs with oversight by UNHCR, recorded 50 such incidents between April 2020 and October 2022 affecting

an estimated 2,157 individuals. Of 58 testimonies, 51 alleged violence during physical removal, either against the person who gave the testimony or against other persons in the group subjected to pushbacks. Allegations included physical and verbal abuse and threats, sexual abuse, and seizure of personal items.

Some local and international organizations alleged, based on survivor testimony, the June 14 sinking of the overcrowded fishing boat *Adriana* was the result of coast guard efforts to pull the boat out of the country's territorial waters. Judicial authorities launched an investigation into the sinking, in which an estimated 600 migrants and asylum seekers died after criminal smugglers put them unsafely aboard. The government reported the boat was in international waters at the time of the incident. On July 26, the EU ombudsperson launched an inquiry and requested access to FRONTEX (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders) files regarding the *Adriana* shipwreck. In September, 40 *Adriana* shipwreck survivors filled a criminal complaint before the Naval Court of Piraeus. On November 10, Ombudsman Andreas Pottakis launched an independent investigation into the shipwreck after Coast Guard leadership denied his written requests it conduct a thorough internal investigation.

The Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) reported incidents of abuse based on ethnicity, religion, or skin color as well as abuse against human

rights activists due to their involvement in assisting migrant groups.

**Freedom of Movement:** Migrants and asylum seekers arriving on one of the country's islands were subject to special border reception and registration procedures, under which they were required to remain in registration centers for up to 25 days before receiving permission to enter and exit using biometric identity cards. Asylum seekers were not permitted to depart the island on which they arrived until the conclusion of the asylum review procedure.

**Employment:** There were no reports of government-imposed restrictions on refugees' ability to work. Asylum seekers were allowed to work following a six-month waiting period after registering. International and local organizations said refugees and asylum seekers faced bureaucratic obstacles impeding access to the labor market, including lack of social security numbers and tax numbers, and difficulty opening bank accounts. The government cooperated with UNHCR, IOM, and NGOs on projects to foster integration of refugees, with emphasis on Greek language and employability skills programs. These programs generally covered only a portion of potential beneficiaries' needs, according to aid groups.

**Access to Basic Services:** The law provided refugees access to services equal to those provided to nationals of the country. Bureaucratic hurdles nonetheless complicated refugees' access to welfare allowances. For example, a refugee could not successfully claim a single-mother allowance

without official documentation of her family situation (including divorce certificate, death certificate, or birth certificate). Although the government supported an IOM-run program to provide housing assistance and other services to refugees for up to one year, the country otherwise had no subsidized housing programs, making it difficult for unemployed refugees to access affordable shelter.

**Durable Solutions:** The government accepted refugees for resettlement, offered naturalization to refugees residing on its territory, or assisted in their voluntary return to their homes. Naturalization requirements for recognized refugees included seven years of residency. The government also processed family reunification applications of asylum seekers' relatives in other countries. On March 29, the government passed legislation providing 10-year residence permits to unaccompanied minors who became adults while in the country. The law required beneficiaries to have completed at least three years of Greek schooling by the age of 23 and to be accepted in vocational training/apprenticeship or university-level schools or institutions. Under previous legislation, migrants from non-EU countries had to complete six years of schooling to receive the same permit.

**Temporary Protection:** As of September 30, the government had provided temporary protection to 26,094 Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. On September 4, Minister of Migration and Asylum Kairidis announced the country would extend temporary protective status for displaced Ukrainians

for an additional six months. The government provided humanitarian or subsidiary protection to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. As of September 30, approximately 630 individuals had received such protection.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provided citizens with the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** National elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities. On June 25, the country held parliamentary elections.

## **Section 4. Corruption in Government**

The law provided criminal penalties for officials convicted of corruption, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were some reports of government corruption. The National Transparency Authority (NTA) oversaw the implementation of a *National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP) for 2022-2025*, conducted investigations, and monitored the implementation of provisions related to asset declarations

and lobbying activities. The Directorate General of the Financial and Economic Crime Unit under the Ministry of Finance was entrusted with fraud and corruption cases. The Directorate of Internal Affairs investigated corruption within the Independent Authority for Public Revenue; the Internal Affairs Agency for Law Enforcement Bodies investigated crimes, including corruption, committed by law enforcement. The Court of Audit was the highest financial court and audit institution regarding use of public funds.

**Corruption:** In 2022 the NTA received 3,513 complaints of alleged corruption, fraud, and maladministration (3,057 in 2021) and carried out 575 audits and inspections (393 in 2021), of which 13 (21 in 2021) were referred for prosecution. There were 32 convictions either at appeal or first instance levels (24 in 2021) and 15 acquittals (21 in 2021). Imprisonment was suspended in 28 of the 32 conviction cases.

In February parliament passed a new law systematizing the asset declaration process; three months earlier it passed whistleblower protection legislation consistent with an EU directive.

The whistleblower law entrusted the NTA with receiving, managing, and monitoring complaints about corruption; the law mandated written, verbal, and online mechanisms through which public and private sector employees could submit concerns.

Most notable corruption cases during the year involved police. On January 29, Supreme Court Prosecutor Dogiakos ordered a preliminary inquiry into a press article alleging links between high-ranking police officers and criminal gang leaders. On May 29, authorities arrested five border police officers on allegations of involvement in a smuggling network bringing migrants from Türkiye.

See the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups, although several organizations working on migration matters continued to report undue pressure, including unreasonable bureaucratic obstacles; increased financial scrutiny; defamation lawsuits; criminal charges of money laundering, espionage and fraud; and press reports intentionally targeting groups with fabricated allegations of criminality.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders:** Several NGOs working on migration stated they faced intimidation by authorities, including increased scrutiny regarding financial records. Many attributed this to their reporting of pushbacks and mistreatment of migrants and asylum seekers by law enforcement. Some NGOs reported disproportionate difficulties obtaining legal status and access to financial benefits such as tax exemptions. The law required NGOs conducting search-and-rescue operations in areas under coast guard jurisdiction to be registered and to act only when the coast guard was unable to intervene. Persons convicted of violating this law were subject to one to three years' imprisonment and fines.

On January 25, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor publicly called pending criminal charges against human rights defenders Panayote Dimitras of Greek Helsinki Monitor and Tommy Olsen of the Aegean Boat Report "arbitrary." In late 2022, both activists were charged with "forming or joining for profit and by profession a criminal organization with the purpose of facilitating the entry and stay of third country nationals into Greek territory." In January a judicial council banned Dimitras from carrying out his NGO's activities and communicating with "irregularly entering foreigners." Lawlor called these restrictions "very disturbing." In May media alleged the Anti-Money Laundering Authority had frozen Dimitras' personal and business assets, including those of his NGO, on grounds he had been misusing his NGO's EU grant funding. Dimitras denied the allegations and claimed he was the victim of a smear campaign.

Several other NGOs working in migration said press outlets fabricated similar stories involving money laundering-related investigations. On June 12, Lawlor tweeted that “leaks of such investigations” were “commonly used to smear human rights defenders.”

On March 17, the Greek Council for Refugees and the Hellenic League for Human Rights sent a joint letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the UN special rapporteur on the rights of migrants, the commissioner for human rights of the Council of Europe, and the European commissioner for migration and home affairs, describing “the demonization of civil society organizations active in the field of refugee protection” and “the misuse of criminal provisions” against those “who bring to light the numerous pushback allegations and/or appeal to justice on behalf of the victims.” In July the European Commission described the country’s civic space as “downgraded from narrowed to obstructed,” citing the pressure faced by civil society organizations working with refugees and asylum seekers.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The Office of the Ombudsperson, a state body considered independent and effective, investigated complaints of human rights abuses by individuals. Five deputy ombudspersons dealt with human rights, children’s rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality-of-life problems. The office received adequate

resources to perform its functions. In its 2022 annual report, the office reported receiving 17,035 complaints, of which 70 percent were within its scope and of which 62 percent were satisfactorily resolved.

The autonomous, state-funded National Commission for Human Rights advised the government on protection of human rights. It was considered independent, effective, and adequately resourced.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalized rape (including of men), as well as spousal and domestic or intimate partner rape and other forms of domestic and sexual violence, including “corrective rape” of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex, or other sexual minorities (LGBTQI+) persons. Rape of a person, regardless of gender, and attempted rape were punishable by minimum 10 years’ imprisonment, and up to life imprisonment in cases of gang rape, multiple rapes by the same perpetrator, or rape resulting in death. Charges could be pressed without a survivor’s complaint. If a survivor did not wish to seek prosecution, the prosecutor could decide to drop charges. There were isolated reports of police holding survivors on criminal defamation charges pending resolution of rape allegations, although this was contrary to official policy. The law applied equally to all survivors, regardless of gender, although members of

marginalized communities, such as Roma and LGBTQI+ persons, reported undue bureaucratic obstacles.

Penalties for domestic violence ranged from one to three years' imprisonment, depending on the severity of the violence. The court could impose longer prison sentences for crimes against pregnant or minor survivors. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively, although domestic violence remained underreported. In March Hellenic police announced a mobile "panic button" app through which victims of domestic violence in Athens and in Thessaloniki could safely and quickly call for help. Police operated 18 domestic violence offices during the year.

A November 14 EU Group of Experts on Action against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence report revealed that although the country had made progress in combating violence against women, serious concerns remained, particularly regarding victim protection, implicit attitudes about gender-based violence among police, prosecutors, and judicial decision-making officials; high rates of witness/victim attrition; and low conviction rates, particularly in cases of rape. The report also noted victims of gender-based violence had insufficient access to asylum procedures.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment:** There were reports of sexual harassment at the workplace in both the private and the public sector. In its May 17 report on sexual discrimination for 2021-2022, the ombudsperson reported handling 40 cases in 2022, 95 percent of which

were submitted by women. Penalties for conviction of sexual harassment were up to three years' imprisonment for perpetrators who used positions of authority or exploited the survivor's need for employment.

The law required employers to investigate and report cases of workplace harassment.

**Discrimination:** The constitution and law provided for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, including under family, religious, personal status, and nationality laws, as well as laws related to labor, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit, and owning or managing businesses or property. The government effectively enforced the laws promoting gender equality, although discrimination occurred, especially in the private sector. In 2022 there were 205 complaints filed of violation of equal treatment of men and women at work: of them, 71 were resolved and 80 were referred to courts. Across these cases, the government imposed total fines of €13,750 (\$14,850) in fines.

Some employers continued to treat pregnancy as a problem or a burden for their businesses, resulting in a wide range of inequitable treatment.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence although not all survivors were aware of or

could access these services in a timely manner. Emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape. There were some reports about migrant, refugee and Romani girls not attending school during menstruation due to poverty and lack of access to menstrual products.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

While the constitution and law prohibited discrimination against members of minority groups, Roma and members of racial or ethnic groups – including migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees – faced discrimination including on labor issues. There were some government programs to mitigate societal, racial, and ethnic biases, but they often lacked consistency and effectiveness. On May 15, a report by INTERSOS Greece noted that although beneficiaries of international protection had the right to receive the same social assistance as Greek nationals, severe accessibility barriers rendered these legal provisions “void of meaning.” The same report noted that in January the European Commission started an infringement procedure (letters of formal notice) against the country for failing to comply with EU law by applying discriminatory criteria that de facto excluded beneficiaries of international protection from most social benefits in the country, such as the condition of five or more years of legal and uninterrupted presence in the country.

In its 2022 report the RVRN cited 33 attacks against migrants, refugees, and

asylum seekers on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, or skin color.

Authorities reported 126 incidents motivated by hatred on various grounds, of which 84 were linked to nationality, ethnicity, race, and skin color.

Several of the alleged perpetrators were police.

On August 18, police announced the arrest of four Greek nationals accused of the August 12 murder of a Pakistani worker found stabbed to death.

Police identified robbery as the motive; several human rights activists alleged a racist motive behind the killing.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination, social exclusion, and harassment, including ethnic profiling by police, alleged abuse while in police custody, discrimination in employment, limited access to education, and segregated schooling.

## Children

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship was derived from Greek parents at birth; a single parent could confer citizenship on a child. Parents were obliged to register their children within 10 days of birth. The law allowed delayed birth registration but imposed a fine. Children born to non-Greek parents in the country were not conferred Greek citizenship, causing many asylum seekers to complain their children born in the country were effectively stateless.

The government reported children born to non-Greek parents in the country acquired Greek citizenship from birth if they would otherwise be stateless.

**Education:** Education was free, compulsory, and universal through the secondary level. Children of asylum seekers, most of whom resided in closed controlled-access facilities and Reception and Identification Centers, had insufficient access to formal education. The number of refugee and migrant children who remained out of school was relatively small compared with previous years, but retention and regular attendance remained problems. Additionally, teachers often lacked expertise and tools to help children from different backgrounds. Local officials often excluded Romani pupils from schools or sent them to Roma-only segregated schools. Some members of the Muslim minority in Thrace said the quality of minority school education was inferior, citing the absence of bilingual (Greek-Turkish) middle and high schools.

**Child Abuse:** The law prohibited corporal punishment and child abuse. Authorities effectively enforced the law for reported cases. Smile of the Child, an NGO operating a children's crisis hotline, said it reported at least two incidents of child physical abuse to authorities per day. The government provided treatment, prevention programs, and foster care or accommodation in shelters for abused and neglected children. Government-run institutions were understaffed, and NGOs reported insufficient space to cover all needs. On March 10, parliament passed antibullying legislation mandating the provision of guidance to schools on reporting and handling bullying.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal age for marriage was 18, although a court could authorize persons who were 16 and 17 to marry. The government effectively enforced the law, except in the case of Romani children, especially tent-dwellers living in isolated settlements. Although official statistics were unavailable, NGOs reported illegal child marriage remained common in Romani communities, with girls often marrying at 15 or younger, and male Roma often marrying between 15 and 20.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The legal age of consent was 15. The law criminalized sex with children younger than 15. The law prohibited the sale, grooming, or use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking. The law also prohibited child pornography or other forms of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Authorities generally enforced the law. There were media reports of child pornography-related arrests and sexual abuse of minors by close relatives, neighbors, and family friends.

## **Antisemitism**

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish population was approximately 5,000. Antisemitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs.

On January 31, unknown perpetrators vandalized the new “Jewish Martyrs Square” sign in Thessaloniki, leaving an anarchist symbol in black marker. This incident followed the January 12 vandalism of a mural commemorating

the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as the late December 2022 vandalism of a monument marking the location of an old Jewish cemetery within the Aristotle University campus. The same mural was also vandalized upon its completion in 2021. On November 8, perpetrators threw black paint on the Holocaust Memorial in the city of Kavala. Kavala Mayor Mouriadis ordered the cleaning of the monument and denounced the attack, calling it “an unacceptable act of intolerance and blind fanaticism.”

On March 14, the Athens Bar Association announced it had disbarred Konstantinos Plevris, defense attorney of the now-defunct neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, for having given Nazi salutes in the courtroom on three occasions.

On March 28, Hellenic Police reported having cooperated with the National Intelligence Service and Mossad, Israel’s national intelligence agency, to dismantle a terrorist network planning attacks against a synagogue and a kosher restaurant in Athens. Police arrested two suspects of Pakistani nationality and identified a third suspect, also Pakistani, who allegedly recruited and instructed the others from abroad. The two suspects remained in custody pending trial.

On April 11, parliament passed a law preventing “criminal organizations disguised as political parties” from running in national elections. On May 2, the Supreme Court rejected far-right Hellenes party’s application to run,

finding it was led by incarcerated Ilias Kasidiaris, a former Golden Dawn leader. The court stated, “The party incites violence and aims to weaken the institutions of the rule of law.”

The government continued to promote International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance-consistent Holocaust education in schools. In February 2022, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs cosigned a memorandum of understanding with the Shoah Memorial in France, the Jewish Museum of Greece, and the Mohammed Ali Research Center, to educate teachers, students, and civil society actors about the Holocaust and other genocides. The ministry also covered the cost of educational visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau for middle- and high-school students who distinguished themselves in video contests about Holocaust-related topics.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** There were no laws that criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors. Seemingly neutral laws were not disproportionately applied to target LGBTQI+ persons to justify arbitrary arrest.

**Violence and Harassment:** Some violent incidents targeting LGBTQI+ individuals were reported, in some cases leading to arrests. In its report for 2022, published April 6, the RVRN recorded 38 gender identity and sexual orientation attacks, which included verbal insults, threats or other harassment, and violence. According to the RVRN, police recorded 16 incidents in 2022 related to sexual orientation and seven to gender identity. Authorities launched investigations and made arrests in some cases.

LGBTQI+ activist Vanessa Veneti Kottika reported 15 men physically attacked her outside an Athens nightclub June 10, ostensibly due to her gender identity. In July an undocumented trans woman from Cuba was killed in her Athens apartment. On July 20, police announced the arrest of a male Bangladeshi national in the case but reported no information regarding the possible motive.

On March 30, the Supreme Court rejected a prosecutor's appeal of the early release of one of two men convicted in the 2018 death of LGBTQI+ activist Zak Kostopoulos. The other convict had already been released to serve his sentence at home due to his advanced age. Both were sentenced to 10 years in prison.

**Discrimination:** The law prohibited discrimination, including regarding employment, by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law recognized LGBTQI+ individuals and couples, although LGBTQI+ persons did not possess equal rights. LGBTQI+ persons continued to advocate for the right of same-sex couples to adopt children and for legal recognition of children born and raised in same-sex families. The state barred trans persons from employment with the police or coast guard on "mental health grounds." Trans individuals continued to face problems accessing the labor market.

Offices combating race crimes and hate crimes prosecuted crimes targeting LGBTQI+ individuals. The government enforced antidiscrimination laws and respected the right of imprisoned trans individuals to be detained in facilities in accordance with their gender identity.

On March 29, the NGO Transgender Support Association hailed the government's efforts to quickly reinstate access for trans individuals to hormone therapy, which was suspended in January due to a glitch in an online system. Activists said trans and nonbinary individuals faced

difficulties accessing hormone therapy, noting hormone blockers were not available in the country. This lack of access was especially pronounced for LGBTQI+ members of marginalized groups, such as migrants and asylum seekers.

Societal discrimination and harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals, including LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants, remained a concern. On April 24, vandals painted swastikas on a rainbow fence outside an elementary school in Lagadas. On June 24, during the 11th Pride Parade in Thessaloniki, local media reported police successfully stopped a group of youth throwing rocks at floats in the Lefkos Pyrgos area.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** Unmarried transgender individuals older than 15 could update documents to reflect their gender identity without undergoing gender affirmation surgery, provided a judge validated the change. Trans activists argued trans individuals should be allowed to self-certify their gender identity rather than having to rely on a judge.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** The law banned “conversion therapy practices” on children and on adults without the individual’s explicit consent and affirmation they were under neither duress nor coercion. Additionally, practitioners were banned from advertising “conversion therapy” practices. Violators faced a prison sentence and a fine as well as loss of license. Repeated violation of the law

constituted an aggravating factor in sentencing. The law also banned surgical and other “sex correcting” medical interventions on intersex infants but allowed such interventions on intersex minors who had reached the age of 15 and who had given their free and informed consent. The law required permission from a local magistrate’s court, following recommendations by an interdisciplinary committee consisting of experts, including a representative of the intersex community. The law stipulated six months in prison and a fine for doctors who performed operations on intersex children. NGO Intersex Greece noted many doctors pressured pregnant women to undergo selective terminations of healthy intersex fetuses.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:**

There were no laws or other restrictions on individuals speaking or media reporting on LGBTQI+ matters, on the ability of LGBTQI+ individuals to assemble in public or private or to form associations, or on the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to legally register or convene events.

**Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities were unable to adequately access education, employment, public buildings and transportation on an equal basis despite an antidiscrimination law. According to NGOs and disability rights organizations, the government did not enforce nondiscrimination provisions effectively or consistently, although it made efforts to provide information

about disability-related concerns in accessible formats. On January 21, Thessaloniki police arrested an owner and an employee of a care facility for those with disabilities on grounds they had abused a patient who was found restrained, in bad health and undernourished. On September 5, a man who press reported had an intellectual disability drowned at the port of Piraeus after crew members pushed him off the boarding ramp of a departing ferry. The victim attempted to board the ferry after boarding had concluded; the crew reportedly made no attempt to save him. The captain and three other crew members faced charges of manslaughter with possible malice, complicity in manslaughter, and dangerous interference in maritime transport. The minister of shipping and island policy resigned following the incident due to public protest of his comments on the incident.

Most children with disabilities had the choice to attend either mainstream or specialized schools for specific disabilities through secondary education, including schools for the deaf. The ombudsperson continued to report staffing gaps in special education resulting in children with special needs being without a teacher for significant periods of time and the lack of sufficient facilities for handicapped children. On September 9, media reported on a court ruling that no private school could deny attendance to an autistic child.

Persons with disabilities continued to have poor access to public buildings, transportation, and public areas, although such access was required by law.

The most serious deficiencies included access to buildings, ramps for sidewalks, and accessible public transportation. The ombudsperson noted handicapped parking spaces were below the requisite 5 percent and frequently deviated from required dimensions.

NGOs reported authorities denied housing and psychosocial support to unaccompanied children with disabilities and mental health issues once they turned 18, resulting in many individuals left homeless or in camps unsuitable to meet their needs. They also noted a shortage of medical staff, mental health specialists, and interpreters in such facilities.

The government made efforts to provide designated rooms in electoral centers for voters in wheelchairs to take part during the May 21 and June 25 national elections.

On February 16, parliament passed a bill incorporating all directives in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the final conclusions (Oct. 29, 2019) of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and all the initiatives of the government's National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

On May 10, the government launched a pilot project in Attica providing subsidized home assistants for 1,000 individuals.

Access to employment remained inequitable.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Although the law prohibited employment discrimination against individuals with HIV, societal discrimination remained a concern. Persons with HIV or AIDS were exempt on medical grounds from serving in the armed forces.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right of workers, except members of the military services, to form and join independent unions, conduct labor activities without interference, and strike. Armed forces personnel had the right to form unions but not to strike. Police had the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike.

For a trade union to be formally established, the law required a minimum of 20 founding members. The law generally protected the right to bargain collectively. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Legislation also prohibited the recruitment of strikebreakers throughout the duration of a lawful strike and lockouts. The law allowed company-level agreements to take precedence over sector-level collective agreements in the private sector, but in all cases, the law mandated a statutory minimum wage applicable for all.

Trade unions meeting the statutory minimum membership could engage in collective bargaining. If no trade union was present in an enterprise, the law allowed associations of five or more workers to engage in collective bargaining. Unions said that this allowed employers to bypass unions and bargain with smaller and less powerful associations, undermining efforts to organize genuine unions.

Only trade unions could call strikes. Any such decision could be made by at least one-half of the union's active registered members. The law permitted trade unions to convene meetings digitally. Under the law a decision to strike could not be made if members of a union were not provided a virtual means to take part in the discussion and vote. Courts could declare a strike illegal and abusive if there was a risk of financial ruin for the enterprise and if the principle of proportionality was violated. Public utility and transportation workers had to give four days' notice before a strike; private-sector workers had to give 24 hours' notice. The law mandated minimum staffing of one third during strikes affecting critical public services such as hospitals, mass transportation, and sanitation. If calling a strike, a union had to defend the right of employees who did not take part to travel freely to and from work without hindrance or threat of corporal or psychological violence. If this clause was violated, the strike could be suspended. On April 14, media reported courts declared several strikes unlawful and abusive, including by five different unions and associations of unions.

The law gave authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order was obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempted individuals with a documented physical or mental disability. The law prohibited the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strikes.

The government enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, but procedures to resolve labor problems were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibited the worst forms of child labor. A presidential decree permitted children 15 or older to engage in hazardous work in certain circumstances, such as during vocational or professional training. In such cases workers had to be monitored by a safety technician or doctor.

Hazardous work included that which exposed workers to toxic and cancer-producing elements, radiation, and similar conditions. The minimum age for employment, including in the industrial sector, was 15, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age did not apply to short-term light and daytime work in family-run agriculture, forestry or livestock. Given Labor Inspectorate approval, children over three were allowed to work in cultural activities if their health (physical and mental) could be proven unaffected.

The Labor Inspectorate was responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties for conviction ranging from fines to imprisonment. The government did not always effectively enforce such laws. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for analogous crimes and regularly applied against identified and reported violators.

Family members reportedly compelled some children to beg, pick pockets, or sell merchandise on the street. The government and NGOs reported most offenders were Greek Roma, Bulgarian, Romanian, or Albanian Roma.

There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor.

#### **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The government set the national minimum salary

above poverty level for private-sector employees and unspecialized workers. On April 1, the government increased the minimum monthly wage to €780 (\$843). The maximum legal workweek was 40 hours. The law provided for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, one month paid vacation per year, and limits on the amount of overtime work. Overtime work required premium pay, and employers had to seek Ministry of Labor and Social authorization. Premium pay ranged from an additional 20 percent to 100 percent of the prorated daily wage, based on total hours, day of the week and time of the day. The law also required that for every hour of unlawful overtime work, the employer paid an additional 120 percent of the daily wage. Employers also provided compensatory time off.

Employers were required to declare in advance and digitally register changes to employee work schedules, including overtime. Some sectors were required to issue digital work cards, allowing authorities to monitor staff hours and leave in real time. Employers could be fined for any violation and the government could suspend business operations in case of repeated violations. Courts were required to promptly examine and issue rulings regarding employee complaints of delayed payment.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The law provided minimum standards of occupational health and safety (OSH) applicable for all industries. It placed responsibility for identifying unsafe situations on occupational safety and health experts rather than workers. Workers had the right to file a

confidential complaint with the Labor Inspectorate regarding working conditions and to remove themselves from such situations without jeopardizing their employment. Owners who repeatedly violated the law concerning safety standards could face temporary closure. The government proactively identified unsafe conditions and responded to workers' occupational, safety, and health-related complaints. Implicated sectors included manufacturing, food service, hotels, agriculture, and construction.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The government enforced minimum wage, hour, and OSH laws, mostly in the formal sectors of the economy and when complaints were filed. The Labor Inspectorate was responsible for enforcement of all labor laws, other than those pertaining to mining and marine shipping, which fell under the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Shipping and Island Policy respectively.

Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections, impose fines, and initiate sanctions. The number of inspectors was not always sufficient, especially in the islands and during the tourist season. In February the Labor Inspectorate reported having conducted 59,476 onsite checks from January to November 2022 in various employment categories, including school bus drivers, delivery service providers and construction workers. The labor inspectors found more than 11,800 violations and issued fines exceeding €32 million (\$34.6 million). Penalties for violations were commensurate with similar violations such as fraud or negligence and

applied regularly.

During a prolonged July heatwave, the Ministry of Labor banned outdoor work in the afternoon under threat of fines. Archaeological sites were closed nationwide.

Trade unions said enforcement of labor standards remained inadequate in shipping, tourism, construction, manufacturing, catering, and agriculture sectors, as well as in small businesses and the informal economy, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups, including migrant workers. Overtime work was not always registered officially or paid accordingly. The European Organization for Health and Safety at Work data found 85 labor-related deaths in the country from January to June.

The informal sector accounted for approximately 30 percent of the economy, and was largely concentrated in tourism, agriculture, and service sectors. Informal workers were not protected by wage, hour, occupational safety or health laws. The government took some steps to increase the employability of migrant, asylum-seekers, and refugee women to be trained as nannies or helpers at home for persons with disabilities. The government also offered businesses subsidies for hiring certain vulnerable workers, including asylum seekers and refugees.