

GREECE 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority is vested in a unicameral parliament, which approves a government headed by a prime minister. In 2019 the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. A government formed by the New Democracy Party headed by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis leads the country.

Police are responsible for law enforcement, border security, and the maintenance of order. They are under the authority of the Ministry of Citizen Protection, which is also responsible for prison facilities. The Coast Guard, responsible for law and border enforcement in territorial waters, reports to the Ministry of Shipping Affairs and Island Policy. The armed forces are under the authority of the Ministry of National Defense. Police and the armed forces share law enforcement duties in certain border areas. Border protection is coordinated by the Ministry for National Defense. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police, Coast Guard, and armed forces, and the government had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse. Members of security forces committed some abuses.

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; restrictions on free expression and media including enforcement or threat to enforce criminal libel and slander laws; forced returns and alleged violence by government authorities towards migrants and asylum seekers; inadequate investigation and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence; crimes involving violence targeting members of national/racial/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 or engaged in corruption, whether in the

security forces or elsewhere in the government. There were, however, reports and complaints from nongovernmental organizations and international organizations regarding government failures to effectively investigate allegations of abusive police practices and forced returns of asylum seekers and to hold those found 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 was at least one allegation the government or its agents committed an arbitrary or unlawful killing. On December 5, a police officer shot Roma Kostas Fragoulis, age 16, in the head after he allegedly fled a gas station after not paying for 19 euros (\$20) of gas. According to police who pursued the teen, Fragoulis made dangerous maneuvers with his vehicle and attempted to ram the motorcycles of the pursuing officers. Fragoulis was transported to the hospital and died a week later. An investigation is ongoing.

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 prohibit such practices. There were reports, however, of police mistreatment and abuse, including against members of racial and ethnic minority groups, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, demonstrators, and Roma (also see section 2.e., Protection of Refugees, and section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination). Local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and media outlets continued reporting cases of law enforcement authorities abusing undocumented migrants and asylum seekers during pushback operations at Greece-Turkey (Türkiye) land and sea borders, as well as at preremoval centers and detention facilities. NGOs have advocated for the establishment of an independent government agency to investigate violence

and other alleged abuses.

During the year, several media and NGO reports raised concerns about instances in which police or border guards were alleged to have used violent and dangerous tactics to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from entering the country.

According to these reports, some migrants and asylum seekers alleged authorities beat them and took their clothes, money, and cell phones, and left them stranded in the Aegean or on islets in the Evros border region for days without access to food, water, or medical intervention. In some cases, authorities claimed they were unable to locate those stranded or that they were not authorized to assist because the islets were not Greek territory. Some reports criticized authorities for allegedly not following the European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) interim measures to protect migrants and asylum seekers.

Several reports also cited cases of migrants and asylum seekers who hid in the wild after landing on eastern Aegean islands, fearing they would be forcibly returned to Turkey. There were also reports of individuals drowning in the Evros River or the Aegean Sea or dying of dehydration or exhaustion. For example, on July 12, the Racist Crimes Watch reported the death of a Somali asylum-seeking woman who died of exhaustion due to hunger and thirst after hiding in the mountains of Chios to avoid deportation. The incident prompted reaction by main opposition members of parliament, and the ombudsman requested a proper investigation.

On September 2, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) published a report on its November 2021 visit to the country. The report highlighted possible inhuman and degrading treatment arising from prisoners "left to fester in overcrowded and totally inappropriate conditions."

In the same report, CPT found that most detained persons questioned by the delegation, except for some inmates at the Corfu Prison facility, stated that custodial staff behaved appropriately towards them. At Corfu Prison, the committee received "a few allegations of physical ill-treatment of prisoners (punches and kicks) by certain prison officers" as punishment for challenging orders given by prison officers. The report called the Corfu cells "totally unacceptable for holding persons even for short periods" since they were "dirty,

damp, dilapidated” and had “no running water, no access to natural light, crumbling walls, and limited ventilation.”

On July 14, an appeals court upheld a lower court’s finding that two police officers were guilty of torture after a man was rendered wheelchair-bound following a 2017 detention at a police station; however, members of civil society criticized the appeals court for reducing the eight-year prison sentence to a three-year suspended sentence.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center deficiencies included overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and access to health care, and inadequate provision of basic supplies, such as cleaning materials, cutlery, and plates.

The CPT report found that “no tangible progress” was made in almost a decade “to address the Committee's very serious concerns under Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights,” and that conditions for many prisoners in the country are “an affront to their human dignity.” After concluding that the situation would not improve in the near future, the committee announced its decision to invoke Article 10, opening the possibility for the committee to issue a public statement if two-thirds of its members approve.

In his 2021 report, the ombudsman also noted the absence of enough interpreters to facilitate communication between prison authorities and foreign detainees. Inmates in preremoval centers reported police mistreatment and physical and verbal abuse (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

Abusive Physical Conditions: Government statistics issued in September indicated the prison population exceeded holding capacity. Nationwide, prisons were built to accommodate 10,175 inmates, but prisons held 10,723 inmates as of November 16. For example, facilities in the cities of Tripoli, Komotini, and Volos exceeded capacity by 219 percent, 214 percent, and 190 percent respectively. The CPT report noted that many cases of overcrowded cells or dormitories led to “less than [five square yards] of living space, and in many instances less than [four square yards], per person.” The report said Korydallos Men’s Prison was “grossly overcrowded” with some cells holding up to six inmates. The report noted

incarcerated Roma were especially likely to experience overcrowding in this facility. The CPT concluded most prisons lacked organized recreational, athletic, or vocational activities, and the educational programs had limited space and a shortage of teachers. Violent incidents among detainees in prison facilities continued to decline and there were no reported fatalities from inmate clashes. The CPT report noted levels of interprisoner violence have significantly reduced since 2019 with fewer hospitalizations. The report also noted, however, that many cases likely went unreported due to intimidation by powerful groups of prisoners. Authorities conducted regular and extraordinary inspections for drugs and improvised weaponry. Some migrants and asylum seekers detained by members of the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard alleged physical abuse or detention conditions that could be considered inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment (see subsection on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses, above).

Administration: Independent authorities investigated credible allegations of mistreatment in prisons. The CPT noted the existence of a locked prisoner complaint box but criticized the absence of a clear policy regulating the complaints system and those responsible for administering it. The Ministry of Citizen Protection, through the Secretariat General for Anticrime Policy, published bimonthly detention-related statistics on the occupancy rate and the design capacity per prison. Prison authorities generally respected the religious freedom of detainees, including the right to religious counsel, prayer, and specialized diet.

Independent Monitoring: The government generally permitted independent nongovernmental observers to monitor prison and detention center conditions. Authorities required NGOs, diplomatic missions, and foreign and domestic journalists to submit formal requests in advance for each visit to closed and controlled access facilities, reception and identification facilities, and official migrant and asylum seeker camps.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and give any person the right to challenge the lawfulness of an arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements. The ombudsman, through the

National Preventive Mechanism for the Investigation of Arbitrary Incidents, received 288 complaints in 2021, most of which related to police and involved insult to human integrity, health, or personal freedom. More than half of complaints reported abusive behavior taking place during arrests, detentions, and other police operations. In many cases victims of police abuse were minors, young persons, foreigners, migrants, or asylum seekers. Some complaints alleged violent pushbacks of migrants and asylum seekers by the Hellenic Police or the Coast Guard at sea and land borders. The ombudsman reported improvements in law enforcement authorities' willingness to cooperate, including launching disciplinary investigations of police conduct and sharing forensic reports and video footage for the ombudsman's assessment.

On September 7, the president of the Athens Bar Association, Dimitris Vervesos, filed a report alleging police from the Exarchia district police station in central Athens abused two lawyers on September 2 after they questioned the officers' request to see their identity papers. According to the report, the officers used force to immobilize and handcuff the two men, and took them to the nearest police station, where one was strip searched and briefly detained without charges.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and requires judicial warrants for arrests, except during the commission of a crime. Detainees are promptly informed of the charges against them at their first court appearance. The law requires police to bring detainees before a magistrate, who must issue a detention warrant or order the detainee's release within 24 hours. By law, pretrial detention may last up to 18 months, depending on the severity of the crime, or up to 30 months in exceptional circumstances. These rights were generally respected. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial; there is a functioning bail system and other options for release pending trial. Individuals are entitled to state compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained. There were no reports that police violated these laws. Detainees may contact a close relative or third party and consult with a lawyer of their choice or one provided by the state. The law provides for the latter right after a person is formally charged with a criminal offense rather than from the outset of custody.

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.

On March 6, the NGOs Greek Council for Refugees and Oxfam issued a joint report regarding conditions at the newly established closed controlled access center for pending asylum seekers in Samos. The report stated one in five residents had been placed in “de facto” detention for two months, despite a December 2021 court ruling finding this practice illegal. The joint report said witnesses reported that the center’s administration used “revenge tactics,” including early morning raids, unexplained transfers to the police station, and oral eviction notices to residents appealing a negative asylum decision. The report also noted “excessive use of security,” such as constant closed-circuit-television monitoring of all residents.

The ombudsman’s annual report noted “the prolonged administrative detention” of migrant and asylum-seeking individuals at preremoval centers, on the islands, and on the mainland. The ombudsman also noted cases of individuals who were detained while awaiting examination of their asylum application at second instance. He pointed out a rejection of a first petition is not a valid ground to deprive applicants of liberty.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports of arbitrary or unlawful arrests and detentions. For example, on July 28, Halandri city council member Sotiris Lapiaris and three other individuals were arrested after taking part in a protest in support of the conditional release of an anarchist serving 20 years for armed robbery. Lapiaris alleged authorities falsely accused them of launching an attack against the police. On July 7, approximately 40 health professionals were arrested for obstructing traffic and civic disobedience after demonstrating against vaccine mandates outside the prime minister’s residence. The Union of Health Professionals for Democracy and Freedom accused the government of engaging in “arbitrary arrests” and “blatant repression” claiming the demonstration had been peaceful and had taken place after prior communication with the relevant authorities.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Authorities respected court orders. Observers continued to track the case of Andreas Georgiou, who was the head of the Hellenic Statistical Authority during the country's financial crisis. The Council of Appeals cleared Georgiou three times of a criminal charge that he falsified 2009 budget data to justify the country's first international bailout. Georgiou appealed a 2017 criminal conviction for violation of duty to the European Court of Human Rights. Separately, a government official, acting as a private citizen, filed a civil suit against Georgiou in 2014 alleging slander in a press release from Georgiou's office. In 2017, a court found Georgiou guilty, and in October 2021 the Supreme Court granted Georgiou an injunction until January 2023, when it was scheduled to consider his appeal of the slander conviction.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Some NGOs criticized the quality and lack of availability of interpretation.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law provides citizens with the ability to sue the government for compensation for alleged violations of rights. Individuals and organizations may appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies, including the European Court of Human Rights.

Property Seizure and Restitution

NGOs and advocacy groups reported that the government did not make significant progress on resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens, despite existing property restitution laws and mechanisms. The law addresses property restitution, and many Holocaust-era property claims have been resolved,

but several matters remained open. The Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece (OPAIE), a public law entity, claimed more than 100 properties owned by Jews before the war were occupied as government facilities. In 2018 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of OPAIE regarding one of the property cases. Following the ruling, a committee of government appointees and representatives of the Central Jewish Council was established in 2019 to negotiate the disposition of the remaining properties. During the year, the Committee met once, virtually, but made no decisions on ownership of certain properties,

The Jewish community of Thessaloniki had a pending case against the Russian government calling for the return of the community's prewar archives. In December 2021, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) reported Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin informed the Greek prime minister that Russia would return KIS archives; but no action was taken by year's end. Additionally, the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw held religious artifacts allegedly stolen from the Jewish community of Thessaloniki in 1941. The community continued to request return of the artifacts.

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

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, but there were reports of instances in which the government failed to respect these prohibitions. The law places certain conditions and limitations on such prohibitions; for example, a 2021 law provides a national security exception to citizens' right to be notified when the government has breached their communications. Several media reports alleged the government unlawfully used surveillance software to monitor the communications of senior government officials and journalists.

Two instances of interference with privacy and correspondence attracted local and international media attention: on April 11, media alleged the government had used Predator spyware from July 21 to September 24, 2021, to monitor investigative

journalist Thanasis Koukakis. Koukakis filed a complaint with the Hellenic Authority for Communication Security and Privacy in August 2020 alleging his cell phone was being monitored; the authority found no evidence of monitoring existed. On March 28, a report from Toronto University Citizen Lab confirmed Koukakis's suspicions. Koukakis filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights on July 28. Separately, on July 26, Nikos Androulakis, leader of the center-left party PASOK-KINAL, filed a complaint with the Supreme Court Prosecutor's Office, alleging he had found Predator spyware on his mobile phone. Per media reports, his complaint prompted a closed-door discussion in parliament, during which the head of the National Intelligence Service admitted that Koukakis and Androulakis had been monitored. He denied Predator software had been used and asserted surveillance had been conducted lawfully with proper judicial authorization. The government has publicly denied purchasing or using Predator spyware surveillance software. On August 5, Prime Minister Mitsotakis accepted the resignations of his chief of staff and the head of the National Intelligence Service. On September 19, the government passed legislation requiring any government breaches of citizen privacy to be pre-authorized by both a public prosecutor and an appeals court prosecutor. On December 9, the government passed legislation providing a minimum two-year prison sentence for the use, sale, or distribution of spyware.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

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

A European Commission report expressed concerns about nontransparent allocation of state advertising to media, as well as potential political influence in the appointment of public service media board members. On September 21, NGO

Govwatch reported similar findings, highlighting freedom of expression restrictions resulting from the new “fake news” law and the lack of transparency in media funding.

Freedom of Expression: The constitution and law protect freedom of expression but specifically allow 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, or who express ideas insulting to persons or groups on those grounds. On July 17, the deputy minister for contemporary culture and a top economic advisor to the prime minister filed complaints against ultrasensationalist news site *Makeleio* for hateful, homophobic, and slanderous speech against them equating homosexuality with pedophilia and bestiality. The case was pending at year’s end.

The Media Freedom Rapid Response Alliance (MFRR) continued to raise concerns about a November 2021 law allowing prosecution for spreading “fake news” and allowing authorities to act on the suspicion an individual intends to spread “fake news” where there would be national defense, economic, or public health implications. Violation of the law carries a prison sentence of at least three months and a fine. Some NGOs expressed concern the law could be used to penalize media that reported on government actions to repel migrants and asylum seekers.

On June 14, former Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications, and Media Nikos Pappas was indicted for dereliction of duty in his handling of television license tenders in 2016. A businessman alleged Pappas had arranged for him to receive three million euros (\$3.18 million) to take part in the tender process and secure one of the licenses to establish a progovernment channel. Pappas’s trial started November 18.

Violence and Harassment: In a July 13 report, the European Commission (EC) raised concerns about journalists facing threats and attacks. The Council of Europe’s online platform for tracking threats against the media lists 16 alerts for the country. For example, arsonists set fire to Real24 media headquarters July 13. The EC also expressed concerns about nontransparent allocation of state advertising to media, as well as potential political influence in the appointment of public service media board members. On October 24, investigative reporter Tasos

Telloglou alleged intelligence officials surveilled him and collected his cell phone data from May to August, ostensibly due to his investigation of a wiretapping scandal. Three other reporters made similar claims to the Committee to Protect Journalists: Thodoris Chondrogiannos, Thanasis Koukakis, and Eliza Triantafillou.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The government did not censor media although reports indicate it pressured media outlets to forego unfavorable stories about the government. Many NGOs complained that unflattering news about the government, including allegations of serious human rights violations, do not get reported by many outlets, hindering the public's access to information and informed participation in the democratic process.

Govwatch, the MFRR's fact finding mission to Greece, and the Media Pluralism Monitor all reported a lack of transparency in the distribution of state subsidies to media outlets for a health awareness campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government claimed that it gave subsidies based on objective standards, such as quantitative criteria on audience viewing, circulation, affinity indexes on target groups, as well as qualitative criteria such as brand safety. The absence of a publicly available award criteria prompted one NGO, however, to file a request demanding the criteria's disclosure. The court rejected this request on grounds that the petitioner lacked the lawful right to access the information.

The EC also noted concerns about journalists continuing to face criminal lawsuits and government monitoring of private communications of journalists and opposition party members.

Per a 2021 law, media service providers should be registered in the National Radio and Television Council Business Register and provided regular status updates. The government also maintains an online register with the legal status of local websites, their number of employees, detailed shareholder information, and their tax office. Once registered, these websites are accredited to accept funding through state advertising, to cover official events, and to benefit from research and training programs of the National Center of Audiovisual Works. All registered websites must display their certification on their homepage. Although registering

was an open and nonobligatory process, outlets failing to do so could be excluded from the accreditation benefits. A similar electronic registry is in place for regional and local press.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law provides criminal penalties for conviction of defamation, including libel and slander. Individuals convicted of crimes may not claim slander for discussion of their crimes. Media freedom watchdogs continue to raise concerns about the use of such laws to intimidate journalists.

In August NGO Article 19 sent an open letter to the former general secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister, Grigoris Dimitriadis, expressing concerns that a defamation lawsuit against newspaper *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (EFSYN), investigative online portal *Reporters United* and their reporters Nikola Leontopoulos and Thodoris Chondrogiannos, and freelance journalist Thanasis Koukakis, were retaliatory and unfounded. The letter said the lawsuit was a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP), which they defined as abusive litigation filed by powerful individuals aimed at silencing and intimidating legitimate watchdog journalism.

Following a string of lawsuits by multinational companies and executives targeting journalists in the country, the International Press Institute urged authorities to create anti-SLAPP legislation to prevent harassment of journalists.

Nongovernmental Impact: There were no arrests for the 2021 killing of journalist George Karaivaz, who was shot and killed outside his residence in Athens. Karaivaz had been covering organized crime and corruption. Journalists were subjected to physical attack, harassment, or intimidation due to their reporting in at least four instances, with anarchist groups claiming responsibility in three of the four cases. An anarchist group named “Thousands of Suns of the Night” claimed responsibility on an anarchist blog for the July 13 bombing of Real Media Group. The authors said they conducted the bombing because the media group was aligned with the government and its policies on the environment, energy, the pandemic, and Ukraine. A preliminary police account said the remnants of three gas canisters were found in the building; Real Media Group said several individuals were taken to the hospital with respiratory problems. All parties in parliament denounced the attack. On November 22, the minister of citizen

protection announced the arrest of a suspect for the attack. Separately, an anarchist group called “Nuclei of Immediate Action - Nucleus Julian Assange” claimed responsibility for a similar arson attack July 6 outside the residence of member of parliament and former journalist Babis Papadimitriou. Per the group’s online manifesto, the arson was meant to “honor real freedom of speech which is under persecution in the western countries” while portraying Papadimitriou as a dishonorable journalist who was bought off with a seat in parliament. The same group claimed responsibility for a February arson attack at the residence of journalist Dimitris Kambourakis in the Athens suburb of Argyroupoli. On April 6, unknown perpetrators placed four explosive devices outside the residence of journalist Aris Portosalte. In all three cases, police launched investigations but made no arrests.

Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Media: On March 24, the government passed legislation requiring newspapers to make their ownership structure and legal representatives publicly available. The legislation also holds newspaper owners and major shareholders financially liable if a newspaper becomes unable to pay its debts.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports the government systematically monitored private citizens’ online communications without appropriate legal authority. There were allegations authorities misused surveillance technology to monitor mobile devices of specific individuals (see section 1.f.).

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events; however, government restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic required several cultural and artistic events to be rescheduled or cancelled. On March 14, media reported that seven Greek Orthodox priests filed suit against artist Pantelis Kanarakis for posing as Jesus for the magazine *KOITA*. The magazine’s editor responded by removing the photos and issuing a statement expressing no intent to offend, while maintaining artistic freedom as a constitutional right.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Police did not allow protest marches on at least two occasions. On May 14, police refused to allow a group of Palestinians to protest at the Israeli Embassy even though the group had received proper authorization. On July 22, police in the Exarchia neighborhood of Athens prevented feminist groups from holding an unannounced march to protest an attempted rape. According to reports by media outlet *EFSYN*, during December 6 demonstrations to commemorate the 14th anniversary of Alexis Grigoropoulos' killing by police, riot police used tear gas, beat civilians, and sprayed chemicals inside restaurants and apartment buildings when chasing protesters. According to a recent report by the Hellenic League for Human Rights, excessive use of force by police is a systemic and recurring problem.

Violent clashes between police and demonstrators prompted police authorities to launch an administrative inquiry on police violence. The outcome of this inquiry is pending.

Freedom of Association

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, courts continued to place legal restrictions on associations of persons who self-identify as ethnic Macedonian or associations that include the term "Turkish" as indicative of a collective ethnic identity (see section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination). Despite the restrictions and lack of legal recognition, ethnic associations continued to operate. In 2021, the Supreme Court rejected the petition for registration filed by the Turkish Union in Xanthi. The court cited "national security and public order" as grounds for rejection. The union responded that the Supreme Court ruling violated a European Court of Human Rights ruling that it should be allowed to officially register in Greece. On December 5, a court in Florina in northern Greece approved registration of an NGO called the Center for

the Macedonian Language, focused on promoting the language and culture of North Macedonia in northern Greece.

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 provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. Some of these freedoms were partially affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

In-country Movement: Migrants and asylum seekers arriving at Greek islands were subject to special border reception and registration procedures, including quarantine for COVID-19-related health protocols, and they were not allowed to leave registration centers for up to 25 days. After the 25-day period, residents were generally allowed to enter and exit using identity cards with biometric data. Nonetheless, residents were prohibited from travelling to the mainland unless they successfully filed asylum applications. On July 17, the MeRA25/DiEM25 political party said a five-day quarantine for newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers was discriminatory, noting Ukrainians were not subject to quarantine.

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. UNHCR assisted the government with briefings and the distribution of multilingual leaflets and information packages on asylum and asylum procedures. International and local NGOs and media outlets continued reporting on potential asylum seekers entering from Turkey, who were briefly detained and then forced to return to Turkey

without being allowed to apply for asylum (also see section 1.c., Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses).

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established 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. The system includes procedural safeguards for protection and review, with no legal impediments for accessing the asylum process. The law provides for access to certified interpreters throughout the process, access to legal assistance for appeals, and the right to remain in the country while a case is under appeal. Tight deadlines guide each step; missed deadlines may result in a negative asylum or refugee determination and a deportation order. On July 13, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum launched an online asylum petition submission platform for those applicants who entered the country at places other than those with reception and identification centers or closed and controlled access facilities (which are only located on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros, and on the Evros land border with Turkey). The decision attempted to correct the situation caused by a November 2021 requirement that asylum registrations could only be processed at those facilities, leaving many with limited access to apply for asylum. On September 2, media reported the new platform had not significantly improved access to the asylum process. Government officials claimed the system was overburdened with appointment requests and a high no-show rate.

The government did not consistently enforce the law related to asylum. There were reports that authorities repelled or detained asylum seekers attempting to enter the country, oftentimes physically abusing them or depriving them of food and water. Many asylum seekers were reportedly forced onto rafts, which sea currents often carried out of Greek waters. On February 24, *The New York Times* reported a case of 50 migrants who claimed Greek authorities pushed them back from Greece to Turkey across the Evros River. The report alleged 19 of these migrants subsequently died in Turkey due to exposure after “Greek officers had stripped them of their jackets, sweaters and shoes.” The report included testimonies from four survivors and noted the government denied any involvement.

On December 20, the (ECHR) requested authorities provide information about eight pushback incidents out of the 47 complaints it received in 2021.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: On February 21, a joint decree by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum designated 17 safe countries of origin, including Egypt, Benin, Nepal, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Albania, Georgia, Ukraine, India, Armenia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In a similar June 2021 decree, the government designated Turkey a “safe third country” for asylum seekers originating from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia. The decree stated that because Turkey has a functioning asylum process and does not discriminate due to a person’s race, religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, or participation in a certain social group, Turkey is a safe third country. Applications for asylum filed by persons from those countries who transited Turkey before entering Greece could therefore be rejected as inadmissible. Several NGOs, including the Greek Council for Refugees and Solidarity Now, stated “a safe third country” was not compatible with the Geneva Convention. On March 11, the plenary session of the Council of State, the country’s top administrative court, discussed appeals filed by four Afghans and the NGOs Greek Council for Refugees and Refugee Support Aegean against the decree. The court’s ruling remained pending.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: 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. On June 6, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants Felipe González Morales called “pushbacks in Greece” a “de facto general policy.”

Local and international media, human rights NGOs, and international organizations received reports from asylum seekers that they were physically abused and deprived of their personal belongings prior to being returned to Turkey. In a recent government-sponsored independent inquiry, 93 percent of self-identified victims of pushbacks said authorities deprived them of personal property; 77 percent reported being deprived of their identity documents. There were also reports about physical abuse or violence directed at detained migrants and residents of closed controlled facilities (also see sections 1.c., Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses, and 1.d., Arrest Procedures

and Treatment of Detainees).

On April 7, Human Rights Watch issued a report entitled *Their Faces Were Covered: Greece's Use of Migrants as Police Auxiliaries in Pushbacks*, alleging Greek security forces employed third country nationals of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin in “assaulting robbing, and stripping Afghan asylum seekers and migrants...before summarily pushing them back” at the Greece-Turkey land border. Based on interviews Human Rights Watch conducted, individuals attempting to enter the country were not “properly registered” by authorities. According to these accounts, authorities detained the individuals then “forced them to strip down to their undershorts or totally naked” and confiscated their money, mobile phones, and other belongings. It alleged police then handed individuals over to masked men who forced them onto small boats in the Evros River and made them cross to the Turkish side, often forcing them to disembark in the middle of the river and wade to the riverbank in “chest- to chin-high water under freezing temperatures.”

On July 20, the government passed an amendment establishing a special post in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to monitor the protection of fundamental rights in asylum processing; Konstantinos Solkidis assumed the role in December. The amendment also defined procedures for referring allegations to the National Transparency Authority and created a Special Committee for Compliance with Fundamental Rights within the ministry to monitor compliance with domestic and EU border protection laws.

On July 7, in the case of *Safi and Others v. Greece*, the European Court of Human Rights unanimously held that Greek authorities violated Articles 2 (right to life), and 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) in the case of 11 persons who drowned off the island of Farmakonisi after their boat sank in 2014. The court found the government failed to protect lives or properly investigate the incident. Petitioners claimed authorities caused the accident during a pushback attempt, whereas the government argued the shipwreck occurred due to panic during the rescue operation.

The Racist Violence Recording Network reported incidents of abuse based on of ethnicity, religion, or skin color and against human rights activists due to their involvement in assisting migrant groups (see section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic

Violence and Discrimination).

Freedom of Movement: Asylum seekers were not allowed to leave the island where they arrived until the asylum review procedure concluded.

Employment: There were no reports the government restricted recognized refugees' ability to work. Recognized refugees and holders of asylum seeker certification were entitled to work, although this right was not widely publicized or consistently enforced. On April 12, the International Rescue Committee Hellas, the Greek Council for Refugees, and the Diotima Center issued findings about challenges asylum seekers and refugees face in accessing the domestic labor market. Of the 183 survey respondents, 73 percent stated they did not work, while only 20 percent of those who worked had a contract. About one-third of those employed were refugees, while 36 percent were asylum seekers. Roughly half of the respondents cited insufficient Greek or English proficiency as the main obstacle to employment, while approximately 22 percent mentioned bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining the necessary credentials (tax number, social security number). Approximately 76 percent had a tax number, and 48 percent had a social security number, but only 36 percent had been able to open a bank account.

Access to Basic Services: The law provides for access to services such as shelter, health care, education, and the judicial system once the status of a refugee or asylum seeker is official. Due to gaps in the asylum registration process and in the vulnerability assessment process, some asylum seekers had limited or no access to housing and health, educational, and legal services. In December, the Ministry of Migration abruptly ended the ESTIA program, an EU-funded program founded in 2015 to provide integrated and independent apartment living for vulnerable asylum seekers, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, persons with disabilities, and survivors of torture. The government relocated asylum-seekers to reception centers or open accommodation centers far outside urban centers, informing those with recognized refugee status that they would need to find their own onward housing. Opposition parties, human rights activists, and civil society actors argued the closure disrupted the integration of hundreds of asylum seekers, many of whom had already found jobs and schools near their government-leased apartments.

Refugees reported difficulties in obtaining documents required to apply for a job or rent a house, and in obtaining the health booklet needed for medical services. Refugees granted asylum were only provided one month of subsidized housing. Some asylum seekers suffering from chronic diseases encountered problems obtaining proper medication. On June 27, a joint report by Diotima Center, the Greek Council for Refugees, and the International Rescue Committee Hellas described barriers to healthcare, such as lack of interpretation, racist behavior by health professionals, long delays in available appointments, and lack of coordination between services.

On April 12, a refugee education coordinator at the Ritsona Reception Center said more than one hundred primary school students had been excluded from education for the last three years because local authorities had failed to provide transportation to and from school. The ombudsman intervened, requiring the government to ensure access of all children to education in accordance with domestic and international law.

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. The requirement for recognized refugees to apply for naturalization is seven years of residency. The government also processed family reunification applications for asylum seekers with relatives in other countries. From January through July, 143 recognized refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors were voluntarily relocated to EU member states. IOM assisted the voluntary return of rejected asylum seekers and those who renounced their asylum claims. As of July 31, 1,599 individuals had voluntarily returned to their countries through IOM.

Temporary Protection: As of August 17, the government had provided temporary protection to 18,663 Ukrainians fleeing the full-scale Russian invasion. The government also provided humanitarian or subsidiary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. As of July 31, a total of 551 individuals had received such protection.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens 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

Recent Elections: In 2019 the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. As a result of the elections, the New Democracy Party gained a majority of the parliamentary seats and party leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis became the country's prime minister, succeeding a coalition of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) and ANEL (independent Greeks) parties, headed by then Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits participation of women or members of historically marginalized or minority groups from participating in political life on the same basis as men or nonminority citizens, and they did participate. During the year women held 22 percent of elected seats in the national legislature. In the government cabinet, 10 of 57 (approximately 18 percent) ministers and deputy ministers were women. Legislation passed in 2019 requires men and women to each represent at least 40 percent of the total number of candidates in local, regional, national, and European Parliament elections.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for officials convicted of corruption, but the government did not always implement the law effectively. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The National Transparency Authority (NTA) oversees the implementation of a *National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP) for 2022-2025*, conducts investigations, and monitors the implementation of provisions related to asset declarations and lobbying activities.

Corruption: In December 2021, the Criminal's Code bribery provisions were

amended to meet recommendations by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the Council of Europe anticorruption body. In 2021, the Prosecutor for Financial Crimes handled 266 cases, closing 81, while 156 were still pending. The prosecutor pressed charges in 19 cases.

In a July 13 report, the EC noted a higher number of asset declarations, although not all were verified for accuracy. The EC also noted the country lacked a comprehensive legislative whistleblower protection framework.

On August 16, media reported the Internal Affairs Division of Law Enforcement Bodies received complaints implicating 391 police officers, 69 members of the Coast Guard, 346 public sector employees, and 632 private citizens in unlawful acts, including bribery, money laundering, participation in criminal gangs and in smuggling networks in 2021.

On December 11, Belgian authorities arrested Eva Kaili, a Greek member and vice president of the European Parliament, over alleged involvement in a corruption scandal. She was charged with corruption, money laundering, and participation in a criminal organization after having allegedly taken bribes from the government of Qatar. Kaili was stripped of her vice presidential duties and as of December 31 remained in pretrial custody in Brussels. On December 12, the Greek anti-money-laundering authority froze her assets and those of her immediate family.

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

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views, although some organizations working on migration matters reported increased obstacles including police investigations and lawsuits.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs): On December 19, human rights activist Panayote Dimitras, founder of the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor, appeared for questioning before the Investigating Magistrate of Kos on

charges of having set up a criminal organization for actions related to the NGO's communications with individuals seeking asylum. Government officials deny NGO reports of forcible returns or mistreatment of asylum seekers, calling them "fake news" without substantiation. NGOs working on migration questions stated they faced intimidation by authorities, including facing increased scrutiny regarding financial records. Smaller NGOs also reported difficulties registering and accessing tax exemptions and state financial support. Following a June 2021 visit, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor described the government's policy on civil society as having a "suffocating effect," noting defenders working to ensure the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants were "currently under severe pressure," like being accused of crimes and facing bureaucratic harassment for their work. In September 2021, legislation tightened procedures for NGOs to conduct search and rescue operations in areas under Coast Guard jurisdiction. The law requires NGOs officially register, follow port authorities' instructions, and act only when the Coast Guard is unable to intervene. Persons convicted of violating this law are subject to one to three years' imprisonment and fines. Human rights activists claimed the law deterred NGOs from witnessing and recording pushbacks of asylum seekers. Several NGOs, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, and opposition political parties opposed the law. Twenty-four volunteers for the registered search and rescue NGO Emergency Response Center International faced misdemeanor espionage charges related to their work with the organization in Lesvos. A European Parliament report characterized the charges as the "largest case of criminalization of solidarity in Europe." According to Human Rights Watch, the NGO had been forced to cease its operations when its cofounder was held in prolonged pretrial detention in 2018. Human Rights Watch reported the defendants may also face felony charges, pending completion of authorities' investigation.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman, a state body considered independent and effective, investigated complaints of human rights abuses by individuals. Five deputy ombudsmen dealt with human rights, children's rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality of life problems, respectively. The office received adequate resources to perform its functions. In its 2021 annual report, the office reported receiving 18,802 complaints, of which 83 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.

The government referred several reports of Greek authorities conducting land and sea pushbacks to the National Transparency Authority (NTA) and the public prosecutor for investigation. In March 2021, the NTA concluded a three-month investigation in response to allegations by Lighthouse Report and nine other European media platforms, concluding there was no evidence of pushbacks. Human rights activists and civil actors criticized the NTA's findings, arguing the investigation was largely based on interviews with police and coast guard officers who had a clear conflict of interest.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Conviction for rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape, and attempted rape is punishable by 10 years' imprisonment, and up to life imprisonment in cases of gang rape, multiple rapes by the same perpetrator, or if the rape results in death. Charges may be pressed without the need of a survivor complaint. If the survivor does not wish to seek prosecution, the prosecutor may decide to drop charges. The law applies equally to all survivors, regardless of gender.

Penalties for domestic violence range from one to three years' imprisonment, depending on the severity of the violence. The court may impose longer prison sentences for crimes against pregnant or minor survivors. Although authorities generally enforced the law effectively when the crimes were reported, some NGOs stated law enforcement authorities did not respond appropriately to survivors reporting domestic violence. On July 31, a woman in Zakynthos was stabbed to death by her husband after filing a domestic violence complaint against him. Local press criticized the police for leaving the woman unprotected. Media reported that as of September 30, 15 women had died as a result of domestic violence during the year.

Sexual Harassment: Penalties for conviction of sexual harassment are up to three years' imprisonment and may include longer terms for perpetrators who used positions of authority or exploited the survivor's need for employment.

The law includes provisions that require employers to investigate and report cases of workplace harassment.

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

There were no legal, social, and cultural barriers to access to contraceptives. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape.

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide 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 (see section 7.d.). With the notarized consent of concerned parties, members of the Muslim minority in Thrace may request the application of Islamic law for family and inheritance matters.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

While the constitution and law prohibit discrimination against members of minority groups, Roma and members of other minority groups faced discrimination. There were government programs to mitigate poverty, unemployment, and societal, racial, or ethnic biases, but these programs often lacked consistency and effectiveness. The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in its September report that refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants, as well as Roma, were victims of frequent hate speech, at times from politicians and state officials.

According to the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), organized violence

decreased throughout 2021. RVRN attributed this result partially to a 2020 court ruling finding the far-right political party Golden Dawn a criminal organization. In 2021 the RVRN reported 28 attacks against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, or skin color. Authorities reported 135 incidents motivated by hatred on various grounds, of which 115 were linked to nationality, ethnicity, race, and skin color.

Local media and NGOs continued to report attacks, both verbal and physical, on migrants and individuals perceived as foreigners. On May 2, a taxi driver shot a Pakistani migrant in Athens as he returned from a Ramadan celebration with other Pakistani migrants. According to the victim's testimony, the taxi driver opened his window, shouted anti-Muslim slurs, and fired three to four shots. Police launched an investigation but made no arrests. In 2021, the Supreme Court affirmed previous rulings denying the registration of the Thrace-based "Turkish Union of Xanthi," on "natural security and public order grounds." Government officials and courts routinely deny requests by Slavic groups to use the term "Macedonian," claiming the term creates confusion because more than two million ethnically (and linguistically) Greek citizens also identify as being from the region of Macedonia (see section 2.b.).

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. The ombudsman reported a municipality purposefully obstructed Roma citizens from purchasing property by delaying issuance of documents. In February and July, the ECHR applied interim measures to prevent local authorities from evicting Roma families from makeshift homes in Thessaloniki and Lesvos. In Lesvos, authorities defied the measures and demolished the homes.

In March the ombudsman cited authorities for discrimination on grounds of national origin, noting their failure to register large refugee families, resulting in the refugees' inability to obtain the proper certificates entitling them to certain benefits and allowance. The ombudsman's intervention helped to ensure these families receive the necessary documentation through the Asylum Service. In April 2021, the government issued a ministerial decree establishing additional

requirements for naturalization (income, language proficiency, historical and cultural knowledge, and length of residency). Opposition members of parliament criticized the decree for obstructing diverse residents from obtaining citizenship.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from parents at birth; a single parent may confer citizenship on a child. Parents are obliged to register their children within 10 days of birth. The law allows delayed birth registration but imposes a fine. The birth registration process is done electronically to increase transparency and cross-check documents and data. Children born to non-Greek parents in Greece are not conferred Greek citizenship, causing many asylum seekers to complain their children born in Greece are effectively stateless.

Education: Education was free, compulsory, and universal through the secondary level; however, children of asylum seekers, residing mostly in closed controlled access facilities and Reception and Identification Centers, generally had very limited or no access to formal education and only partial access to informal education programs. Local officials often excluded Romani pupils from schools or sent them to Roma-only segregated schools. ECRI noted the level of education among Roma remains low, with high dropout rates, owing in part to insufficient infrastructure. 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.

On June 9, the UN Child Rights Committee expressed concern about the country's policy of detaining children for identification purposes and called on the government to ensure the immediate transfer of asylum-seeking children and their families out of detention centers. The committee also cited concerns about discrimination against Romani children, children with disabilities, and asylum-seeking and refugee children. It asked for measures ensuring all children have effective access to food, healthcare, education, and a decent standard of living.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits corporal punishment and child abuse, but government enforcement was generally ineffective, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Violence against children, particularly migrant, refugee,

homeless, and Romani children, remained a problem. The NGO Smile of the Child said their SOS 1056 National Helpline for Children received one call every two minutes in 2021 about a child in danger, mostly related to abuse or neglect in the home. 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.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage is 18, although a court may authorize minors who are 16 and 17 to marry. Although official statistics were unavailable, NGOs reported illegal child marriage was common in Romani communities, with Romani girls often marrying between the ages of 15 and 17, or even younger, and male Roma often marrying between the ages of 15 and 20.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age of consent is 15. The law criminalizes sex with children younger than 15. The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, offering, or procuring of children for commercial sexual exploitation and practices related to child pornography. 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. According to media reports, a total of 294 children were sexually abused as of September.

Displaced Children: On August 2, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum reported the country hosted 2,023 unaccompanied minors, 87 percent of whom were boys and 8 percent were under age 14. A total of 1,518 lived in shelters, 210 in supported apartments, 152 in emergency accommodation, 128 in Reception and Identification Centers, and 15 in open accommodation facilities. The government continued efforts to reduce the number of unaccompanied minors without durable solutions, including by relocating them to other EU member states. On July 22, parliament amended the guardianship system for unaccompanied minors to expand the range of providers to include local governments as well as nonstate actors. Despite this development, local NGOs reported some unaccompanied minors continued to live in unsafe accommodations, lack proper registration, lack legal guardians; and remained vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation. They also

expressed concern such individuals lose legal status, social protection, access to health care, and the right to work after turning 18, putting them at increased risk of human trafficking and other negative outcomes.

Antisemitism

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish population in the country consisted of approximately 5,000 individuals. Antisemitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs. In April a poll by Athens think tank diaNEOsis indicated almost 32 percent of respondents reported that the term “Jewish people” represented “something bad.” There was one reported incident of antisemitic vandalism and antisemitic graffiti was not uncommon in urban areas. On December 29, vandals desecrated a Holocaust memorial on the campus of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The memorial stands at the site of a Jewish cemetery the Nazis destroyed in 1942. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece released a statement urging University authorities to condemn the incident, restore the monument, and cooperate with law enforcement agencies for the arrest of the perpetrators. Mayor of Thessaloniki Konstantinos Zervas, Minister of Education Niki Kerameus, the main opposition party SYRIZA, and the Hellenic Solution party also released statements condemning the act of vandalism. Per media reports, the cleaning services of the university quickly repaired the damage.

In September the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece criticized the appointment of a Supreme Court vice president, noting the judge had written a controversial minority opinion at the trial of Holocaust-denier Konstantinos Plevris in which she recommended his acquittal and rationalized his views.

On February 15, an Athens court sentenced two human rights activists from the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor to 12 months in prison (suspended for three years), after finding them guilty of “falsely accusing” Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus of “public incitement to violence or hatred” and “abuse of ecclesiastical office” over his antisemitic rhetoric. The defendants appealed the verdict, which they described as institutionalized antisemitism.

On May 13, a court sentenced in absentia a defrocked monk known as “Father

Kleomenis,” for inciting violence against Jews. Kleomenis was sentenced to one year in prison (suspended for three years) and a 5,000 euros (\$5,300) fine.

On February 20, the Municipality of Xanthi, in northern Greece, and the Cultural and Development Center of Thrace unveiled a Holocaust Memorial in memory of the 526 Xanthi Jews who perished during the Holocaust.

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 are no laws that criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: There were some reports alleging police or other government actors incited, perpetrated, condoned, or tolerated violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. Some violent incidents targeting LGBTQI+ individuals were reported. On April 12, several lesbians reported more than 20 individuals attacked them outside a metro station in Athens. In 2021, the RVRN recorded 36 attacks against LGBTQI+ individuals or human rights defenders connected to the LGBTQI+ community. Fifteen of them were due to the victims’ sexual orientation. The attacks included verbal and physical assaults, including at least one case of rape. One of the reported survivors was a minor. Two of the survivors were targeted for a second time. The RVRN also recorded 13 gender identity attacks, which included verbal insults, threats, or harassment, and violence. In one of these cases, the victim was a minor, and the perpetrators were the parents. According to the RVRN, police recorded 20 incidents in 2021 related to sexual orientation and three to gender identity.

On May 3, an Athens court sentenced two men to 10 years in jail for the 2018 death of LGBTQI+ activist Zak Kostopoulos, who died in police custody after being beaten in broad daylight inside and in front of a jewelry store. Four police

officers involved in the incident were acquitted on charges of inflicting fatal bodily harm. On October 23, the Hellenic Police's Disciplinary Board also acquitted the police officers without penalty or fine. One of the two convicted men was conditionally released two months after the verdict, pending appeal. The other convict was allowed to serve his sentence at home due to his advanced age. Human rights groups called the acquittals of the police officers and the sentences of the convicted men "profoundly unjust," arguing police had used unnecessary violent force after Kostopoulos had already been gravely injured.

Discrimination: The law prohibits discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics and recognizes LGBTQI+ individuals and couples, although members of the LGBTQI+ community do not possess equal rights. Members of the LGBTQI+ community continued to advocate for the right of same-sex couples to adopt children and for the legal recognition of children born and raised in same-sex families. Members of the transgender community noted they remained barred from entering law enforcement service, such as in the police and coast guard, in accordance with a 2014 presidential decree barring transgender persons from these professions on mental health grounds. On October 7, the ombudsman issued a statement calling this blanket ban discriminatory and recommending its reversal.

Offices combatting race crimes and hate crimes prosecute crimes targeting LGBTQI+ individuals. On July 23, Hellenic Police issued a detailed guide for its staff members on the handling of violent incidents 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. In a September 2 report, however, the CPT cited instances of strip-searches of transgender women by male officers.

On January 10, the government lifted a 1977 ban on blood donations by gay men.

On June 6, media reported on the case of the first transgender woman and LGBTQI+ activist from Turkey who successfully applied for asylum in Greece.

Societal discrimination and harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals, including LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants, remained a concern. On April 18, trans activists

said a Greek Orthodox priest in Kallithea refused to serve a transgender woman at his soup kitchen, calling her “a devil’s thing,” and urging her to go work as a prostitute if she was hungry. On May 5, the woman’s lawyer submitted a complaint to the disciplinary board of the archdiocese of Athens. On April 19, media reported security staff refused a drag queen entry to a popular night club. On November 4, soccer player Vassilis Tsiartas became the first person convicted under the antidiscrimination law, as amended in 2014. He received a 10-month suspended prison sentence and a 5,000 euros (\$5,300) fine for transphobic comments he made on social media in 2017, which the court found were intended to “incite violence or hatred due to gender identity.”

In its September report, the ECRI noted LGBTQI+ children continue to face intolerant and discriminatory treatment at school, including from teachers.

On June 22, Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, expressed concerns about the situation of LGBTI+ and women's rights defenders in Greece.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Unmarried transgender individuals older than 15 may update documents to reflect their gender identity without undergoing gender affirmation surgery. A judge must validate the change based on the individual’s external appearance. 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 Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: On May 13, a law banned so-called conversion therapy practices on children and banned such practices on adults without the individual’s explicit consent and affirmation they were under no duress nor coercion. Additionally, practitioners are now banned from advertising “conversion therapy” practices. Violators face a prison sentence and a fine as well as loss of license. Repeated violation of the law constitutes an aggravating factor in sentencing. On July 19, parliament banned surgical and other “sex correcting” medical interventions on intersex infants. Per the new law, such interventions may only be performed on intersex minors who have reached the age of 15 and who give their free and informed consent. The law requires 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 stipulates a minimum six-month prison sentence and a fine for medical doctors who unlawfully perform operations on intersex minors. NGO Intersex Greece hailed the new legislation but noted many doctors pressure pregnant women to undergo selective terminations of healthy intersex fetuses.

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

There were no reports of such restrictions.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities were unable to adequately access education, public buildings, transportation, and employment on an equal basis, despite an antidiscrimination law. The government did not enforce nondiscrimination provisions effectively or with consistency, according to NGOs and organizations for disability rights.

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 ombudsman cited staffing gaps in special education resulting in children with special needs being without a teacher for significant periods of time and the absence of facilities for handicapped children.

Persons with disabilities continued to have poor access to public buildings, transportation, and public areas, although such access is required by law. Access to buildings, ramps for sidewalks, and accessible public transportation are the most serious deficiencies. The ombudsman hailed October 2021 legislation increasing accessibility in new and pre-existing buildings but expressed concern the law would have limited practical impact due to general nonenforcement of existing measures, such as unauthorized parking in handicapped spots or obstruction of movement on pathways for visually impaired individuals. He also reported several municipalities were unwilling to make renovations and other adaptations to accommodate the needs of handicapped persons.

Access to employment remained inequitable (see section 7.d.). On May 4, a court sentenced a special education teacher with one-year term in prison, suspended for

three years, for beating an autistic child in 2016, which the individual appealed. The court did not determine that the attack was motivated by hatred against a protected group as claimed.

Government information and communication was not always provided in accessible formats, though the government was making improvements. The government implements a project for improving access to justice for persons with disabilities, through an accessibility work plan. For deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in courtrooms, the government has launched a similar project involving digitalized procedures combined with the necessary equipment.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Although the law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment of individuals with HIV, societal discrimination against persons with HIV or AIDS remained a concern. Persons with HIV or AIDS were exempt on medical grounds from serving in the armed forces. A presidential decree authorizes the dismissal of professional military staff members if a member diagnosed with AIDS does not respond to treatment, but there were no reports of dismissals under this provision.

On March 11, an appeals court upheld the conviction but suspended the lower court's sentence of a municipal employee for disseminating sensitive personal data of an HIV-positive individual to third persons. The NGO Positive Voice criticized the decision, arguing HIV-positive individuals still face significant barriers to social acceptance. In a recent poll, nearly a third of those in the country said persons with HIV "are a danger for society" and "cannot work in proper jobs." A quarter responded they would not start a friendship, rent a house, or sit next to a person with HIV, while 68 percent said they would not associate with HIV positive individuals.

Some new laws were lessening state-sponsored discrimination. In December 2021, the government overturned banning persons with HIV who successfully undergo treatment and have no traceable viral load from being foster parents and adopters. On July 19, parliament passed legislation establishing a medically assisted reproduction unit and cryopreservation bank at an Athens-based public hospital, exclusively for the use of HIV-positive individuals. On September 29, parliament

voted for the official use of pre-exposure prophylactic drugs.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides 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 have the right to form unions but not to strike. Police have the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike.

For a trade union to be formally established, the law requires a minimum of 20 founding members. The law generally protects the right to bargain collectively. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and requires reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Legislation also prohibits the recruitment of strikebreakers throughout the duration of a lawful strike and lockouts. The law allows company-level agreements to take precedence over sector-level collective agreements in the private sector, but in all cases, regular monthly salaries and full-time wages may not be below the statutory minimum salary wage.

Trade unions meeting the statutory minimum membership may engage in collective bargaining. Where there is no trade union present in an enterprise, the law allows associations of five or more workers to engage in collective bargaining. Unions say this allows employers to bypass unions by bargaining with smaller and less powerful associations and undermines efforts to organize genuine unions.

Only trade unions may call strikes. Any such decision should be made by at least one-half of the union's active registered members. A new law took effect January 1 that provides for trade unions to convene meetings digitally. The law requires that a decision to strike may not be made if members of a union are not provided with the virtual means to take part in the discussion and vote. Courts have some parameters under which they may declare a strike illegal and abusive, including when there is a risk for financial ruin for the enterprise and the principle of proportionality is violated. Public utility and transportation workers must give four days' notice before a strike; private-sector workers must give 24 hours' notice. The law mandates minimum staffing of one-third during strikes affecting critical

public services such as hospitals, mass transportation, and sanitation. The union calling for a strike must defend the right of employees who do not take part in the strike to travel to and from work freely without hindrance or threat of corporal or psychological violence. If this clause is violated, the strike may be suspended. In June a Thessaloniki court declared a proposed strike by the Thessaloniki Urban Transport Organization illegal, explaining the skeleton staff would be inadequate. The union filed an appeal. On September 22, an Athens court ruled a 24-hour transportation strike called by the Athens Labor Center for September 21 was illegal because there was improper notification and no skeleton staff available, and because the unions involved did not open their demands to public debate.

The law gives authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order is obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempts individuals with a documented physical or mental disability from civil mobilization. The law explicitly prohibits the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strike actions before or after their proclamation.

The government enforced laws protecting the rights of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Penalties were commensurate with those of other laws involving denial of civil rights, but administrative and judicial procedures to resolve labor problems were generally subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

There were no reports of antiunion discrimination. In March, however, a court in Thiva ruled an employer could lawfully dismiss union members if they did not properly inform the employers of their union activity. The ruling required employees to provide evidence of how they informed their employers of their union activity to substantiate an antiunion discrimination-complaint.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor and provides additional protections for children, limiting their work hours and their work under certain conditions. Several government entities, including the Police Antitrafficking Unit,

worked to prevent and eliminate labor trafficking although critics argued the antitrafficking units except for those in Athens and in Thessaloniki were largely staffed on paper only. There were reports of forced labor, mostly in the agricultural sector and involving migrant workers. Forced begging mostly occurred in metropolitan areas and populous islands, focusing on popular metro stations, squares, and meeting places. Cases of forced begging also involved Romani children. In November 2021, the government amended the penal code to reinstate criminalization of forcing children to beg; such criminalization had been abolished in 2019. Although the government investigated the few filed reports, it did not proactively enforce forced labor laws.

In March 2021, parliament approved legislation amending provisions for employers to invite foreign, non-EU nationals for seasonal farm industry work. Requests could be filled through an electronic platform, increasing transparency, data collection, and targeted inspections. The law provides that the invited farm workers should not be above age 60, should have a minimum 30-day contract extendable to up to 90 days, should work in designated places, and should be housed properly. If charged for their accommodation by the employer, the rent should be reasonable, in accordance with the workers' wages, based on a contract or other valid document and not automatically deductible from their wages. Alternatively, the employer is required to establish that workers have a suitable place to reside on their own means.

Also 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 prohibits the worst forms of child labor. A presidential decree permits children 15 or older to engage in hazardous work in certain circumstances, such as when part of vocational or professional training. In such cases workers should be monitored by a safety technician or doctor. Hazardous work includes work that exposes workers to toxic and cancer-producing elements, radiation, and similar conditions. The minimum age for employment, including in the industrial sector, is 15, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age does not apply to occasional and short-term light work in family-run agricultural, forestry and

livestock activities, provided that such activities are carried out during the day. Following authorization by the Labor Inspectorate services, children above age three, are allowed to work in cultural and related activities if their health (physical and mental) can be proven unimpacted.

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

Younger family members often assisted families in agriculture, food service, and merchandising on at least a part-time basis. Family members compelled some children to beg, pick pockets, or sell merchandise on the street. The government and NGOs reported most offenders were indigenous Roma, Bulgarian, Romanian, or Albanian Roma. The pandemic caused fewer street children to “work” during the lockdown periods.

Penalties for child labor violations were commensurate with those for similar offenses. There were no confirmed reports during the year of more arduous or exploitative forms of child labor.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, religion, national origin, skin color, sex (including pregnancy), ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV or AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those related to civil rights. According to reports by the ombudsman (see section 5) and organizations such as the National Confederation of Disabled People in Greece, discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, sex (including pregnancy), disability and age occurred.

The ombudsman reported potential employers disproportionately hired members of other vulnerable groups, instead of persons with disabilities. The ombudsman also said hiring boards often engaged in blanket rejections of handicapped persons, failing to provide a justified response for their decision. The National

Confederation for Persons with Disabilities requested the cancellation of a tender for staff recruitment at the Public Power Corporation because it did not require at least 8 percent of persons hired be members of vulnerable groups, as the law stipulates for businesses exceeding 50 employees.

In a March 31 report, the ombudsman reiterated findings from previous reporting about employers dismissing women employees from work during and immediately after pregnancy. The law provides for social and welfare benefits to be granted to surrogate mothers, including protection from dismissal during pregnancy and after childbirth. Women who adopt children are entitled to the same leave and benefits.

The ombudsman successfully intervened in several cases impacting pregnant employees, reporting that employers were often unwilling to compromise and were subsequently fined. He noted with concern the 45-year age limit for entry to the National School of Judges. The ombudsman also found some employers unwilling to retain or accommodate employees after they had a partial disability. In the public sector, some open calls for job placements in municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic excluded persons with health vulnerabilities, including disability (also see section 6.). Penalties were regularly applied against reported or identified violators.

Women's salaries were 10.4 percent lower than those of male employees, according to Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy using 2018 statistics.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: By ministerial decree the government sets the national minimum salary for employees in the private sector and for unspecialized workers. These wages were above the poverty income level. As of May 1, the government increased the minimum monthly wage by 7.5 percent, reaching 713 euros (\$756) per month. The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of one month per year, and sets limits on the amount of overtime work which, based on conditions, may exceed eight hours in a week. The law regarding overtime work requires premium pay, and employers must submit information to the Ministry of Labor and

Social Affairs for authorization. Premium pay ranged from an additional 20 to 100 percent of the daily wage, based on the total number of extra hours and the day (Sundays, holidays, etc.), and whether it was night service. The first five hours worked after a 40-hour work week are not considered overtime, but employers are required in such cases to pay an additional 20 percent of the hourly wage. The law also requires that for every hour of unlawful overtime work, the employer pays an additional 120 percent of the daily wage. Employers also provided compensatory time off.

In 2021, parliament passed amendments regarding telework in both the public and private sector, including special leave for parents and caregivers.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law provides minimum standards of occupational health and safety (OSH) in the main industries, placing the responsibility for identifying unsafe situations on occupational safety and health experts and not the workers. Workers have the right to file a confidential complaint with the labor inspectorate regarding hazardous working conditions and to remove themselves from such situations without jeopardizing their employment. Owners who repeatedly violate the law concerning safety standards could face temporary closure of their businesses.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: In 2021, the Labor Inspectorate was removed from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to become an independent authority responsible for enforcement of all labor laws, except for mining and marine shipping (which fall under the Ministry of Environment and Energy and its Mines Inspectorate, and the Ministry of Shipping and Island Policy).

Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections, impose fines, and initiate sanctions. From January 1 to September 21, 2021, labor inspectors cited 4,892 businesses with violations. As restriction measures for the pandemic eased, inspections in the first quarter of the year intensified with 6,722 checks and 567 fines totaling 623,548 euros (\$707,000). Penalties for violations were commensurate with other similar violations such as fraud or negligence and applied regularly against identified or reported violators. The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for all concerns regarding OSH at the national level.

Under the law, employers are obliged to declare in advance and digitally register overtime or changes in employee work schedules. The law fines employers 10,500 euros (\$11,130) per employee for any violation and suspends operations in case of recurrence. Courts must examine complaints filed by employees against employers for delayed payment within two months of filing and issue decisions within 30 days of the hearing.

Trade unions and media reiterated that enforcement of labor standards was inadequate in the shipping, tourism, construction, industry, catering services and agriculture sectors, in addition to the informal economy as well as for migrant workers. Enforcement was also lacking among enterprises employing 10 or fewer persons. On July 4, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs launched a digital work card allowing authorities to monitor work and leave in real time. The initial launch included 121,000 bank and supermarket employees.

There was at least one report of a private businessman, a hotel owner in Crete, forcing his employees to return part of their wages or mandatory seasonal bonuses in cash after depositing them in the bank. Police arrested him November 4 on charges of extortion. Some unions and media also alleged some employers forced employees to unlawfully work while their contracts were suspended due to the pandemic or while they were receiving subsidy allowances instead of salaries paid by employers. Some employees were officially registered as part-time employees but worked additional hours without being paid. Overtime work was not always registered officially or paid accordingly. In other cases, employees were paid after months of delay and oftentimes with coupons rather than cash. Such violations were noted mostly in the tourism, agriculture, and housekeeping sectors.

On July 27, an appeals court in Patras overturned a lower court ruling acquitting an employer who had not given one of his employees a Christmas bonus in 2020. The employee's union called the ruling unprecedented, since the law clearly provides penalties, including a six-month prison sentence of six months or a 900 euro fine or both. The employee filed an appeal with the Supreme Court.

Labor experts characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate.

Media reported at least 11 workers killed and three seriously injured due to workplace-related accidents as of October 5. The fatal accidents occurred in the following contexts: at construction sites, garbage collection site, mines, and a fish farm. Two of the victims were working as delivery men, with one of them being undeclared and a minor (17 years).

Informal Sector: The informal sector accounted for approximately 30 percent of the economy, largely concentrated in tourism, agriculture, and the service sector. Informal workers were not covered by wage, hour, and occupational safety and health laws and inspections.