

GREECE 2021 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 a deputy minister 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 criminal suspects by police and against migrants and asylum seekers by authorities; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including criminal libel and slander laws; forced returns of asylum seekers; 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 failure to effectively investigate and punish police abuse and

the lack of independent investigation of and accountability for widespread credible allegations of forced returns of asylum seekers.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

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

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. There were reports, however, that police mistreated and abused members of racial and ethnic minority groups, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, demonstrators, and Roma (also see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees, and section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination).

Most reports alleged abusive treatment of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in preremoval centers by law enforcement authorities, violence against migrants and asylum seekers during pushback operations at Greece-Turkey land and sea borders, and mistreatment of inmates in detention centers. There were several reported abuses similar to the following examples. According to media reports, on January 30, the Hellenic Police Internal Affairs Division launched an investigation into allegations of violence by police officers against a group of migrants held at the preremoval center in Drama. Police officers allegedly stormed into the cells of detainees, beating them with batons. The violence was reportedly prompted by a protest by some of the inmates against an extension of their detention beyond 18 months.

In a November 2020 report on its ad hoc visit to migrant detention and preremoval

centers in the country, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) reported that, while the vast majority of migrants it interviewed had not been physically mistreated by authorities when they were apprehended and detained, the CPT's delegation received a number of reports by migrants that they have been subjected to slaps on the head, kicks, and truncheon blows by members of the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard. For example, one person held by Hellenic Police at the former Special Missions Unit of the Hellenic Coast Guard at Samos alleged he was struck across the left side of his head with a baton by a police officer after asking to be let out of the cell to go to the toilet, resulting in partial deafness.

In its November 2020 report, the CPT reported that detained migrants were sometimes confined in squalid conditions. In two cells under the authority of the Hellenic Police at the Port of Samos, for example, the CPT found 93 migrants (58 men, 15 women, three of whom were pregnant, and 20 children, 10 of whom were younger than age five) crammed into space that provided each person with less than 10 square feet of living space. Access to natural light was limited, there was no artificial light, no heating, no beds, no mattresses, and unpartitioned in-cell toilets emitted a foul stench. Women were given wet wipes but were not provided any other hygiene products. The CPT report stated, "These conditions clearly amount to inhuman and degrading treatment. The fact that authorities continued to hold this group, many of whom were clearly vulnerable, for 18 days without any efforts to lessen the harshness of their situation could be considered an inhuman punishment."

On June 22, media outlets reported that a Georgian national arrested on suspicion of homicide stated he was interrogated and badly beaten for four days to force a confession for a crime another individual was later identified and prosecuted for committing. On March 9, the Office of the Greek Ombudsman, an independent constitutionally sanctioned authority, stated cases of police violence in 2020 increased by 75 percent and that the number recommended for investigation rose by 25 percent.

The most recent prison and detention center monitoring visit by the CPT took place in 2019. In its 2020 report on the visit, the CPT expressed deep concern that police mistreatment, especially against foreign nationals and members of the Romani community, remained a frequent practice throughout the country and that the

system for investigating allegations of police mistreatment could not be considered effective. The report stated that, during the visit, the CPT received a high number of credible allegations of excessive use of force, unduly tight handcuffing, and physical and psychological mistreatment of criminal suspects during or in the context of police interviews. Alleged mistreatment consisted mainly of slaps, punches, and kicks as well as blows to the head with truncheons and metal objects. The CPT also received some allegations of blows with a stick to the soles of the feet and the application of a plastic bag over the head during police interviews, reportedly with the aim of obtaining a confession and a signed statement.

Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international human rights organizations reiterated complaints of a lack of an independent government entity to investigate violence and other alleged abuses at the border by the Coast Guard and border patrol forces. The National Commission for Human Rights reported that in 2020 police investigated only two pushback abuse cases and no cases were prosecuted and tried. The commission recommended the establishment of “an official independent mechanism to record and monitor informal pushback complaints.”

In the report on its 2019 visit, the CPT stated that its findings “confirm that investigations are still not carried out promptly or expeditiously and often lack thoroughness. Consequently, most cases of alleged police ill-treatment are not criminally prosecuted and very few result in criminal sentences or even disciplinary sanction.” As an example, the CPT noted that none of the 21 outstanding cases of alleged serious police mistreatment made by the police Internal Affairs Directorate in April 2014 had resulted in successful prosecution.

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. Inmates alleged police mistreatment and physical and verbal abuse (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

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 11,131 inmates. For example, facilities in the cities of Tripoli, Ioannina, and Volos exceeded capacity by 217 percent, 198 percent, and 195 percent respectively.

Violent incidents among detainees in prison facilities continued to decline. From January to October, one death and approximately 10 injuries were recorded. Authorities conducted regular and extraordinary inspections for drugs and improvised weaponry.

Inmates continued to complain that government COVID-19 pandemic protection measures were not always sufficient, with congested conditions and a lack of access to medical care and medication. Prison authorities vaccinated inmates for COVID-19, but no data were available regarding the number vaccinated.

On April 28, Secretary General of Special Guards Stratos Mavroidakos denounced police detention center conditions across the country as “inhumane.” According to Mavroidakos, individuals were detained for as long as three months in holding cells and in basements, with a lack of basic sanitation supplies. On July 1, members of parliament (MPs) visited Patras Prison. The prison population of 700 exceeded capacity by 300 inmates. The MPs stated that the prison lacked a full-time physician, enough trained guards, and adequate kitchen facilities.

Police detained undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in reception and identification centers (RICs) on five islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos) and one on the mainland in Evros until the individuals were identified and registered. Some detained migrants alleged physical abuse by members of the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard or were held in conditions that could be considered inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment (see subsection on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, above).

On June 9, General Director of the NGO Doctors Without Borders Christina Psarra described the RICs on Lesvos and Samos as “totally inadequate living spaces.” The NGO Greek Council for Refugees reported that in many cases detention conditions in the preremoval centers failed to meet adequate standards due to their prison-like design and that “police stations and other police facilities, unsuitable

for detention of more than 24 hours, continued to fall short of basic standards.”

Administration: Independent authorities investigated credible allegations of mistreatment. 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.

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 RICs and official migrant and asylum seeker camps. During most of the year, special COVID-19 pandemic restrictive measures prevented access to RICs and to other refugee and migrant accommodation facilities.

Improvements: Construction of two 120-cell wings in the Nigrita prison facility reduced overcrowding.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Both 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 263 complaints in 2020, most of which related to police. According to the Office of the Greek Ombudsman, more than one-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, refugees, and foreigners. The ombudsman noted delays by law enforcement authorities in launching disciplinary investigations of police conduct and sending forensic reports and video footage for the ombudsman’s assessment; however, the ombudsman noted that in most cases authorities cooperated.

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. 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. In its 2020 report on conditions of detention, the CPT reported complaints from individuals who stated they were not allowed while in custody to promptly notify a relative or a lawyer during the initial period of detention, particularly before or during questioning by police, when the risk of intimidation and mistreatment was greatest. The CPT noted that individuals who lacked financial means often met a lawyer only during their bail hearing.

Rights activists and media reported instances in which foreign detainees had limited access to court-provided interpretation or were unaware of their right to legal assistance. In a November 2020 report on detention centers for migrants, the CPT stated it received many complaints from foreign detainees that they had not been informed of their rights in a language they understood or had signed documents in the Greek language without knowing their content and without assistance from an interpreter. 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.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports of arbitrary or unlawful detention. For example, on July 14, Amnesty International stated law enforcement authorities arbitrarily arrested, issued unjust fines, and unlawfully used force against demonstrators (including women's rights activists, trade unionists, members of political parties, lawyers, and others) who took part in November and December 2020 peaceful protests against a blanket ban on demonstrations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amnesty International cited cases of individuals who were initially

transferred to police stations for identity checks and subsequently charged with breaching public health rules (also see section 2.b., Freedom of Assembly).

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 Greek financial crisis. The Council of Appeals cleared Georgiou three times of a criminal charge that he falsified 2009 budget data to justify Greece'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 filed a civil suit in 2014 as a private citizen against Georgiou. The official stated he was slandered by a press release issued from Georgiou's office. Georgiou was convicted of simple slander in 2017. The Supreme Court in October granted Georgiou an injunction until January 2023, when it is scheduled to consider his appeal of the slander conviction.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the rights of defendants to: a presumption of innocence; be informed promptly of the charges; a fair, timely, and generally public trial; be present at their trial; communicate with an attorney of their choice (or have one provided at public expense if unable to pay); adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; free assistance of an interpreter (for any defendant who cannot understand or speak the language used in court); confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present one's own witnesses and evidence; not be compelled to testify or confess guilt; and appeal. Delays in trials occurred mostly due to backlogs of pending cases, understaffing, and the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Trials were public in most instances. By law a suspect or defendant has the right to seek compensation for damages resulting from public officials disrespecting the individual's presumed innocence at any time during legal proceedings. According to the same legislation, the burden of proof of guilt lies with the court and the defendant benefits from any doubt. 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

The law addresses property restitution, and many Holocaust-era property claims have been resolved, but several matters remained open. The NGO Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece (OPAIE) 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 fate of the remaining properties. The Committee has only met once, virtually, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic; no decision on future steps was taken during the year.

The Jewish community of Thessaloniki had a pending case against the Russian government calling for the return of the community's prewar archives. On several occasions throughout the year, authorities, including Alternate Foreign Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, publicly urged the return of these archives. According to the NGO Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), on December 8, Russian Federation president Vladimir Putin informed the prime minister Russia would return the archives. 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 publicly in July 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, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

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.

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 November 11, the parliament approved legislation that allowed prosecution for spreading “fake news.” The law may be invoked by authorities on suspicion that an individual intends to spread fake news regarding the national defense, the economy, and health. NGOs expressed concern the law could be used to penalize media that reported on government actions to repel migrants and asylum seekers.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government did not censor media. The government 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.

On February 20, Deputy Minister of State Akis Skertsos filed a slander lawsuit against journalist Yorgos Tragas for a broadcast report alleging that the deputy minister had facilitated the sexual abuse of unaccompanied minors by the director of the National Theater. On April 23, a court of appeals reversed the slander conviction of broadcast journalist Michalis Tsokanis for reporting that two police officers in Evia had close ties to far-right Golden Dawn Party members.

Nongovernmental Impact: On April 9, two unknown perpetrators shot and killed journalist George Karaivaz outside his residence in Athens. Karaivaz was covering organized crime and corruption problems. His death, reportedly related to his reporting, was condemned by the prime minister and opposition parties, as well as by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and media freedom NGOs. Police had made no arrests by the year's end.

Journalists were subjected to physical attack, harassment, or intimidation due to their reporting in at least three instances. On January 10, a bomb exploded in the car of journalist George Sfakianakis outside the studios of television channel E in Athens. No injuries were reported. Police launched investigations but made no arrests. Government members and opposition parties condemned these attacks.

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 monitored private citizens' online communications without appropriate legal authority.

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.

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 restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government banned protest gatherings of more than 100 persons and restricted social gatherings to a maximum of nine to 12 persons. On July 14, Amnesty International published a report claiming that authorities used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to issue blanket bans on protests between November 2020 and March. According to protesters, police used water cannons and chemical irritants against peaceful protesters.

In July 2020, parliament amended legislation on public open-air gatherings. The amended law requires prior and timely notification, in writing or via email, of planned gatherings to police or Coast Guard authorities and makes protest organizers accountable in case of bodily harm or property damage. Some parliament members and analysts called the law unconstitutional and antidemocratic, arguing it infringes the right of assembly.

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 also section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination). Despite the restrictions and lack of legal recognition, ethnic associations continued to operate. On June 29, 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 the Supreme Court ruling violated a European Court of Human Rights ruling that it should be allowed to officially register in 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 suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation restrictions. Internal movement was only for work, limited shopping, and doctor visits, and a curfew from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. was enforced.

In-country Movement: Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers arriving at Greek islands were subject to special border reception and registration procedures and were not allowed to leave registration centers for up to 25 days. After this 25-day period, undocumented migrants remaining in those facilities were generally allowed to enter and exit but were prohibited from travelling to the mainland unless they successfully filed asylum applications.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, border reception and registration procedures mandated medical tests for all newly arriving migrants and asylum seekers and required 14 days of quarantine. A law passed in 2020 states that asylum seekers deemed "vulnerable" are not eligible to receive expedited examination of their asylum claims or to be transferred to the mainland on vulnerability grounds alone. Once asylum applicants were granted refugee status, they could move off the islands. The law also established closed and partially closed facilities for the temporary reception of asylum applicants, a system NGOs and international organizations criticized as depriving asylum seekers of liberty and having become the norm for most asylum seekers.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. 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. There were reports, however, of potential asylum seekers entering from Turkey being briefly detained and then forced to return to Turkey without being allowed to apply for asylum.

Access to Asylum: The law allows for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system to protect 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 generally no legal impediments for accessing the asylum process. The law provides for access to certified interpreters throughout the process, to legal assistance for appeals, and the right to remain in the country while a case is under appeal. Tight deadlines guide each step which, if missed, may result a negative decision and a deportation order. On September 4, the government amended legislation to make it easier to deport asylum seekers whose cases were denied, reducing the time for them to leave the country from 30 to 25 days.

The government did not consistently respect the law. NGOs and international organizations reported asylum cases in which authorities denied petitions without respecting the 14-day quarantine for arrivals and without allowing the presence of a lawyer during the interviews. There were reports that asylum seekers attempting to enter the country from Turkey were being repelled or detained without food and water, oftentimes ill-treated and physically abused. Many asylum seekers were reportedly forced onto rafts, which sea currents took back to Turkey.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: On June 7, a joint decree by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum designated Turkey as

“safe third country” for asylum seekers originating from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia. The decree states 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 for asylum seekers. Applications for asylum filed by persons from those countries who transited Turkey before entering Greece were examined under a fast-track process and could be rejected as inadmissible. Several NGOs, including the Greek Council for Refugees and Solidarity Now, expressed concerns regarding the decree, stating that the notion of a safe third country was not compatible with the requirements set by the Geneva Convention. On August 25, the Appeals Authority in Lesbos reversed a decision by a local regional asylum office to reject the applications for international protection by an Afghan family that entered the country from Turkey and stated Turkey could not be considered a safe third country.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: There were allegations of physical abuse or violence directed at detained migrants and residents of RICs by members of the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard (see section 1.c., Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

Local and international media, human rights NGOs, and international organizations received testimonials from asylum seekers that they were physically abused and deprived of their personal belongings prior to being returned to Turkey. For example, in a July 15 report, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights stated it had received credible allegations regarding “individual or group pushbacks at Greek-Turkish borders as well as the use of life-threatening methods in the course of deterrence operations at sea.” Additionally, it cited violent fights among rival groups and incidents at the RIC in Samos of extortion, arson, rape of women and girls, and human trafficking.

The Racist Violence Recording Network reported incidents recorded in 2020 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). Authorities did not always provide adequate security or physical protection to migrants and asylum seekers, particularly those attempting to cross Greece-Turkey land and sea borders.

Freedom of Movement: Asylum seekers were not allowed to leave the island where they arrived until the asylum review procedure concludes. Human rights activists in Lesbos reported that some COVID-19 pandemic restrictions continued for asylum seekers after the restrictions were lifted for the general population.

Employment: Recognized refugees and holders of asylum seeker certification were entitled to work, although this right was not widely publicized or consistently enforced. There were limited options for employment, made scarcer by the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic obstacles that included opening a bank account or obtaining a tax or social security registration number.

Access to Basic Services: The law provides for access to services such as shelter, health care, education, and the judiciary once the status of a refugee or asylum seeker or asylum seeker is official. Due to staff shortages, pandemic-related restrictions, gaps in the vulnerability assessment process, and other bureaucratic obstacles, asylum seekers had limited access to health, educational, legal, and other services.

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. Human rights activist reported that refugees granted asylum were only provided one month of subsidized housing. Some asylum seekers suffering from chronic diseases encountered problems obtaining proper medication. On July 21, the European Court of Human Rights issued a decision ordering the government to provide adequate health care to three asylum seekers, an adult torture survivor and two children, suffering serious medical conditions at the Kara Tepe RIC.

On March 11, the ombudsman reported that only 178 of the 2,090 children who resided at RICs were registered to attend school. The ombudsman cited as reasons the lack of staff, facilities, transportation, and resistance by local communities. On June 9, Christina Psarra, general director of the NGO Doctors Without Borders, described the RICs on Lesbos and Samos as “totally inadequate living spaces.” During the year the Ministry for Migration and Asylum had walls built around some reception facilities, citing the need for controlled access and increased security for the residents. For example, on September 18, a 3,000-person RIC was opened on Samos with “closed and controlled access.” to hold migrants and

asylum seekers. Some refugee residents and human rights NGOs stated the ministry's motive was to isolate refugees from the rest of the society.

Durable Solutions: The government accepted refugees for resettlement, offered naturalization to refugees residing on their territory, or assisted in their voluntary return to their homes. In 2020 the number of years of residence required before a recognized refugee could apply for naturalization was increased from three to seven. The government processed family reunification applications for asylum seekers with relatives in other countries. From January to September 16, 1,720 recognized refugees, 1,603 asylum seekers, and 976 unaccompanied minors were voluntarily relocated to EU member states. The IOM assisted the voluntary return of rejected asylum seekers and those who renounced their asylum claims.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary (subsidiary) protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees; no data were available on the numbers assisted.

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. In the government cabinet, 10 of 57 (approximately 18 percent) ministers and deputy ministers were women.

Legislation passed in 2019 requires a minimum of 40 percent distribution of male and female candidates in local, regional, national, and European Parliament elections. During the year women held 22 percent of elected seats in the national legislature.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for officials convicted of corruption by officials, but the government did not always implement the law effectively. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: On July 14, parliament ordered the prosecution of former minister of digital policy, telecommunications, and media Nikos Pappas on charges of “repeated and continuous breach of duty” for manipulating and orchestrating the auction of a television channel license to a businessman in return for favorable media coverage.

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. COVID-19 pandemic mitigation restrictions, however, impeded access to reception and detention facilities for migrants on the islands and, in certain circumstances, to official camps on the mainland.

NGOs that reported on forcible returns to Turkey stated they faced potential intimidation by authorities. For example, 24 volunteers with the NGO Emergency Response Center International were arrested on charges of espionage and conducting a smuggling ring. According to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor, human rights defenders were falsely accused of serious crimes and faced bureaucratic harassment for trying to help asylum seekers

and refugees.

As of September 4, legislation tightened procedures for NGOs to conduct search and rescue operations in areas under Coast Guard jurisdiction. The law requires such NGOs to register, follow port authorities' instructions, and act only when the Coast Guard is unable to intervene. Persons convicted of violating law are subject to one to three years' imprisonment, substantial fines, or both. Human rights activists claimed the law aimed at intimidating and preventing NGOs from witnessing and recording pushbacks of asylum seekers at sea. Several NGOs, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, and opposition political parties opposed the law.

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 2020 annual report, the office reported receiving 18,491 complaints, of which 81 percent were satisfactorily resolved.

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

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Conviction of rape, 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. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively when the crimes were reported; however, some NGOs stated law enforcement authorities did not respond appropriately to survivors reporting domestic violence. As of December 15, police recorded 17 homicides of women by existing or former husbands or male partners. In one case a neighbor claimed to have called police to report violence 19 days before the fatal incident, but police who came to the scene left immediately without intervening.

On January 14, Olympic sailing medalist Sofia Bekatorou revealed that an official in the National Sailing Federation sexually abused her more than 20 years previously, marking the first time a prominent woman made a public revelation and sparking the country's version of the global "Me Too" movement. Government officials expressed solidarity with Bekatorou, and prominent newspapers and broadcasters reported on the topic, which generally had been taboo in mainstream media. The Supreme Court encouraged prosecutors to prioritize responding to such claims and the government launched the metoogreece.gr website that urged survivors of gender-based violence to follow Bekatorou's example. In response, other women, primarily from the sports, entertainment, and business arenas, shared similar experiences. Prosecutors launched investigations against alleged perpetrators, some of whom were well-known actors and directors.

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 the survivor's need for employment. In November 2020 the NGO ActionAid reported that 85 percent of women were subjected to sexual harassment. The research was based on a sample of 1,001 women from across the country and an additional 376 women working in tourism and catering. Based on the same research, only 6 percent officially denounced the incidents.

During the year parliament passed several laws that addressed sexual harassment. On June 19, parliament adopted into law the International Labor Organization Convention on Violence and Harassment. 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.

Some pregnant women and mothers with newborns, particularly those residing in the five reception and identification centers for asylum seekers in the Aegean islands during the COVID-19 pandemic, faced obstacles in accessing proper health care and hygiene products.

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.

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. With the notarized consent of concerned parties, Muslim minority persons in Thrace may request the use of sharia 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.

According to the NGO Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), the pandemic contributed to a public perception of migrants and refugees as a threat to public health. In 2020 the RVRN reported 74 attacks against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, or skin color. Authorities reported 222 incidents motivated by hatred on various grounds, of which 166 were linked to nationality, ethnicity, race, and skin color; eight incidents specifically targeted Romani persons.

Local media and NGOs continued to report attacks, both verbal and physical, on

migrants and individuals perceived as foreigners. For example, on August 11, seven Greek nationals reportedly used knives and crowbars to beat, rob, and shoot 15 Pakistanis in their homes in the Crete village of Agios Georgios. Five of the survivors were seriously injured. Police arrested the alleged attackers, who were charged with robbery, causing bodily harm, damaging property, and violating the law on the use of weapons. The Pakistanis received official protection as victims of racist violence. The mayor of Agios Georgios denounced the incident, noting that it caused sorrow and horror in the area. The alleged attackers were in pretrial detention at year's end.

On June 30, the Supreme Court affirmed previous rulings that denied the registration of the Thrace-based "Turkish Union of Xanthi," on "natural security and public order grounds." Government officials and courts also 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 from the region of Macedonia.

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.

On October 25, police shot and killed a 20-year-old Romani man, following a car chase in Perama, in western Athens. In addition a 15-year-old Roma was injured. Seven police officers were arrested in connection with the death. Initial findings showed that police knew the perpetrators were Roma. Human rights activists criticized the officers for abusing their authority and using disproportionate measures. The incident prompted the government to announce a series of new policing measures, including the introduction of body-mounted cameras, protocols for police emergency response, a 10-month training program for frontline officers, the digitization of the Police Operations Center, and the addition of 20 dispatchers to coordinate active incidents (see section 1.c., Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

The 2020 ombudsman report stated noninclusion of the Roma into municipal registries persisted and that there were reports of municipal authorities refusing to

issue certificates attesting that the municipal taxes had been paid that Roma required to purchase property. There were reports of authorities sometimes denying registration as citizens to Roma born in the country to unregistered parents. The ombudsman stated Roma often lacked documentation necessary to meet eligibility requirements.

On April 22, the government issued a ministerial decree that opposition MPs criticized for setting income, Greek language proficiency, knowledge of Greek history and culture, and length of residency requirements to obtain naturalized citizenship that were too stringent.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from one's 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 in such cases. In February 2020 the government passed legislation allowing the birth registration process to be completed electronically to increase transparency and facilitate the cross-checking of documents and data.

Education: Education was free, compulsory, and universal through the secondary level; however, children of asylum seekers, residing mostly in RICs, generally had 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. Some members of the Muslim minority in Thrace complained the quality of minority school education was inferior, including the absence of bilingual (Greek-Turkish) middle and high schools.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits corporal punishment and child abuse, but government enforcement was generally ineffective, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Violence against children, particularly migrant, refugee, homeless, and Romani children, remained a problem. From January to June, the NGO Smile of the Child reported an 82 percent increase in the number of calls regarding abused children in need of psychological support.

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. While 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. On February 9, authorities reported receiving 300 cases of child pornography and sexual abuse of children in 2020. There were media reports of child pornography-related arrests and sexual abuse of minors by close relatives.

Displaced Children: According to National Center statistics, as of December 31, 2,225 refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children resided in the country. Local NGOs reported cases of minors living in unsafe accommodations who were not properly registered, lacked legal guardians, and were vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation. The government continued efforts to reduce their number, including by relocating them to other EU member states. In April the NGO METAdrasi opened the country's first homeless shelter for minors. During the year police ended the practice of holding minors in detention centers. There were reports of the sexual abuse of minors in migrant shelters.

Institutionalized Children: Media reported that on December 23, Deputy Labor Minister Domna Michailidou announced an investigation into a complaint of sexual abuse involving five boys ages seven to 11 in an Athens orphanage. Female workers at the orphanage allegedly forced children to engage in sexual acts that they filmed. Michailidou stated authorities had removed the children from the facility, suspended government funding to the orphanage, and referred the matter for possible prosecution. The deputy minister added that the orphanage's management board had failed to act on a complaint of abuse it received three

months earlier.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish population in the country consisted of approximately 5,000 individuals. Anti-Semitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs. There were at least three incidents of graffiti and vandalism.

KIS continued to express concern regarding political cartoons and images using Jewish sacred symbols and making Holocaust comparisons. On January 18, KIS issued a statement protesting a sketch of the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp in a political cartoon used regarding opposition to a university education bill referring to it as “a hideous and vulgar instrumentalization of the Holocaust for political purposes.” On March 9, KIS issued a statement denouncing columnist Elena Akrita for comparing life in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp to life in contemporary Greece because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. KIS stated that Greek Jews “will never stop denouncing any attempt to denigrate and instrumentalize the Holocaust, which leads to the oblivion and distortion of history.”

Reports of anti-Semitic incidents of vandalism included damage to a mural honoring Holocaust victims at the Thessaloniki New Train Station and desecration of graves in the Ioannina Jewish cemetery in Epirus.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities were unable to access education, health services, public buildings, or transportation on an equal basis with others, despite a law that prohibits discrimination. Government information and communication is not always provided in accessible formats. 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.

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 vehicles were among the most serious deficiencies. Ramps were often too steep or uneven, and ramps on public transportation were often out of order.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

While 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 May 13, main opposition party MPs criticized a decision by the National Organization for Public Health to allow the transfer to an unrelated management post of the only gynecologist-obstetrician working in a public hospital with expertise in the treatment of HIV-positive pregnant women. The 35 MPs argued that the transfer in effect eliminated the only available unit throughout the country dedicated to births of healthy infants from HIV positive mothers.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons in housing, employment, and government services such as education and health care. The government enforced antidiscrimination laws, which include sexual orientation and gender identity, as aggravating circumstances in hate crimes. Offices combatting race crimes and hate crimes include in their mandates prosecuting crimes targeting LGBTQI+ individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Societal discrimination and harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals, including LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants, remained a concern. Some violent incidents targeting LGBTQI+ individuals were reported. LGBTQI+ community members reported they continued facing hardships and domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown because they were forced to spend long periods at home with families who were not always accepting of their gender identity.

In 2020 the RVRN recorded 14 attacks based on sexual orientation, 12 based on gender identity, and four on mixed grounds. The attacks because of sexual orientation included verbal and physical assaults. In three cases the survivors were minors. Two of the survivors were targeted for a second time. The gender identity attacks included verbal insults or threats and harassment, and at times violence. The RVRN stated the incidents were unprovoked and based solely on the external appearance and features of the survivors. The RVRN also underscored the increasing number of cyberbullying attacks against LGBTQI+ students because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift from in-person to virtual classes. According to information communicated to the RVRN, police recorded 24 incidents in 2020 related to sexual orientation and eight to gender identity.

On June 27, media in Thessaloniki reported that a refugee member of the local LGBTQI+ community, received hospital treatment after a group of approximately 10 individuals physically attacked him and his friends inside a university campus. The perpetrators made homophobic and racist comments and hit them with bottles, punches, and kicks.

Members of the LGBTQI+ community continued to advocate for the right to adopt

children by same-sex couples and the legal recognition of children born and raised in same-sex families. On June 28, the NGO Transgender Support Association (SYD) hailed the government's decision to include transgender individuals as vulnerable and eligible for state budget employment subsidies. On March 16, SYD issued a statement criticizing police and the national defense general staff for barring transgender individuals from joining police academies and the armed forces. Unmarried transgender individuals older than 15 may update documents to reflect their gender identity without undergoing sex reassignment surgery. A judge must validate the change based on the individual's external appearance. According to SYD, the hearing process does not always have the necessary privacy and dignity for the applicant.

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.

Only trade unions may call strikes. Any such decision should be made by at least one-half of the union's active registered members. On June 19, a law was passed that provides for trade unions to convene meetings in person, digitally, or both. Effective January 1, 2022, the law requires that a decision to strike may not be made if members of a union are not provided with the means digitally to take part in the discussion and vote. A strike may be considered unlawful if certain

conditions and procedures are not observed, for example based on the proportionality principle, which enables courts to decide in each case whether the anticipated benefit from the strike is greater than the economic damage to the employer.

There are legal restrictions on strikes. Laws which took effect in June established a mandatory four-day notification requirement for public-utility and transportation workers and a 24-hour notification requirement for private-sector workers. The law mandates minimum staff levels during strikes affecting critical public services such as hospitals, mass transportation, and the collection of garbage. The law defines minimum staff levels as one-third of the personnel, which should be provided to the employer prior to the strike's launching. The obligation for a skeleton staff applies to both public and private sectors. By law the union that calls for a strike "is obliged to defend the right of the employees who do not take part in the strike so they can arrive at work and depart freely without hindrance and without facing corporal or psychological violence. If this clause is violated, the strike may be suspended."

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 generally protected the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and effectively enforced the law. Penalties for conviction of violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining laws were commensurate to those of other laws related to civil rights. Courts may declare a strike illegal for reasons such as a failure to respect internal authorization processes or to secure minimum staff levels, failure to give adequate advance notice of the strike, and introduction of additional demands during the strike. Administrative and judicial procedures to resolve labor problems were generally subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

There were no reports of antiunion discrimination. Union members protested the

law that took effect June 19, arguing that it weakened the right to strike and expressing concerns that the skeleton staff requirement was too high.

On December 14, media reported that the Federation of Bank Employee Unions, the Center of Athens Labor Unions, and the Association of ACS/Postal Services Employees appealed a June 19 law requiring unions of employees and employers to be on a national register or face sanctions, including suspension of funding. Filed with the Council of State (the highest administrative court), the appeal stated the law contravened the constitution and the EU General Data Protection Regulation prohibiting unnecessary inclusion of personal data in archives.

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. There were reports of forced labor, mostly in the agricultural sector, and involving migrant workers. Forced begging mostly occurred, albeit limited due to the pandemic and the lockdown, in metropolitan areas and populous islands, focusing on popular metro stations, squares, and meeting places. The government did not always enforce effectively laws related to forced labor. Penalties for conviction of violations were commensurate to those of other serious crimes, such as kidnapping, but victims seldom reported violations.

On March 12, parliament approved legislation amending provisions for employers to invite foreign, non-EU nationals for seasonal farm industry work. Requests were 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 most of 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 it is necessary as part of vocational or professional training. In such cases workers should be monitored by a safety technician or a medical 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 upon conditions mostly related with maintaining their health (physical and mental) 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 enforce effectively laws related to child labor. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other serious crimes such as kidnapping.

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. On June 9, the NGO Association for the Support of Youth reported that 137 children were working in the streets of Thessaloniki in 2020 and during the year. There were reports unaccompanied migrant children were particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation and worked mainly in the agricultural and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing sectors.

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.

The government did not always effectively enforce these laws and regulations. Penalties for conviction violations were commensurate with other laws related to denials of civil rights such as electoral interference. According to reports by the ombudsman and organizations such as the NGOs National Confederation of Disabled People in Greece and the Transgender Support Association, discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, sex (including pregnancy), disability, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity occurred.

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. In his 2020 report on equal treatment, the ombudsman reiterated previous findings regarding pregnancy and maternity being treated by the employers as problems, at times resulting in dismissals from work. According to the ombudsman, pregnant women and mothers of newborns, working in the private sector, continued being subjected to dismissal or a downgrading of their positions after they returned to work. Female civil servants continued reporting instances of sexual harassment and sexist behavior by male colleagues. There were also reports citing indirect discrimination of women interested in joining the Fire Brigade and the armed forces by requirements such as a minimum height or minimum level of professional experience. A study by the NGO ActionAid released in 2020 revealed that 85 percent of 1,300 women surveyed responded they had been subjected to sexual harassment (see section 6, Discrimination and Societal Abuses). In addition the ombudsman reported cases of interventions with employers in the state and private sectors in support of employees who faced discrimination on grounds of disability and age. The ombudsman reported that cases of age limits arbitrarily set in open calls for candidate staff at the Bank of Greece and the National School of

Judges had prompted his intervention. The ombudsman also reported a successful intervention in which he prevented a private company having job applicants include their religious affiliation on the application forms.

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. On July 26, the government announced its decision to increase the minimum wage by 2 percent, effective January 1, 2022.

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. These provisions were not effectively enforced in all sectors, particularly in tourism, catering services, retail businesses, agriculture, the informal economy, or for domestic or migrant workers. In June the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, institutionalized a digital work card allowing authorities to monitor work and leave in real time. The same law provides fines for the offending employers of 10,500 euros (\$12,100) per employee for any nonapplication of the measure and a suspension of business operation in case of recurrence.

The government also introduced amendments to law, regarding telework in both the public and private sector, including for the employees' right to disconnect, and special leave for parents and caregivers (see also section 6, Women).

As part of the revised labor law, the Labor Inspectorate was elevated to an independent authority with no supervision by ministries, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of all labor laws, including those related to wages and hours, as well as preserving its competencies and jurisdictions. The number of inspectors increased, but COVID-19 pandemic restriction measures reduced their ability to conduct physical checks to enforce compliance. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The government did not always enforce wage and overtime laws effectively. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other similar violations such as fraud.

Unions and media alleged some private businesses forced their employees to return in cash part of their wages and mandatory seasonal bonuses after depositing them in the bank. On September 13, a court in Chania, Crete, convicted an employer of threatening his employees with dismissal or removal if they did not return, in cash, part of their salary and sentenced him to 40 months in prison. Unions and media also alleged that some employers forced employees to unlawfully work while their contracts were suspended due to the pandemic and while they were receiving subsidy allowances by the state 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, not cash. Such violations were noted mostly in the tourism, agriculture, and housekeeping sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law provides minimum standards of occupational health and safety 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 undeclared work or safety standards could face temporary closure of their businesses. Under the same law, employers are obliged to declare in advance and digitally register their employees' overtime work or changes in their work schedules. Courts are required to examine complaints

filed by employees against their employers for delayed payment within two months of their filing, and to issue decisions within 30 days after the hearing.

The Labor Inspectorate is also responsible for all concerns regarding occupational safety and health at the national level. The Labor Inspectorate is the principal authority overseeing labor conditions in both the private and public sectors, 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). Labor experts characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate. The government did not effectively enforce occupational safety and health laws. Penalties for conviction of violations were commensurate to those of similar crimes.

Authorities may temporarily close businesses that hire undeclared employees and may permanently close businesses that repeatedly violate the law. Nonetheless, trade unions and media reiterated that enforcement of labor standards was inadequate in the shipping, tourism, and agriculture sectors. Enforcement was also lacking among enterprises employing 10 or fewer persons.

Media reported at least 13 workers were killed due to work accidents, six of the deaths were attributed to electrocution. Media outlets also reported at least 11 injuries of workers throughout the year. On October 25, a man was killed at the Piraeus Port container terminal after he was hit by a bridge crane. Several media reported the accident occurred after the end of the work shift when the worker returned to pick up personal items. The local union of port workers and seamen claimed the accident happened during working hours, accusing the employer of gaps in labor safety rules and procedures. The fatal accident prompted public reaction and a number of strikes called by the victim's coworkers. On June 17, the Supreme Court ordered compensation of 300,000 euros (\$345,000) to the family members of a male worker who was killed while demolishing a roof. The court found that the employer failed to provide information to the victim regarding work preceding the demolition as well as proper protection which would have saved the victim's life.

Informal Sector: The informal sector comprised approximately 30 percent of the

economy. Informal workers were not covered by wage, hour, and occupational safety and health laws and inspections.

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