

2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece

GREECE (Tier 2)

The Government of Greece does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Greece remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and convicting more traffickers and identifying significantly more victims. The anti-trafficking unit (ATU) resumed joint inspections with labor inspectors, and the government created the Office of Justice Statistics to improve collection of reliable crime statistics, including trafficking. Parliament passed legislation providing for special judicial investigators in Athens and Thessaloniki dedicated to trafficking cases. The Hellenic Police (HP) issued an order for all police to screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators and, while procedures for victims to receive official victim status usually lasted years, the government issued a circular to all prosecutors requiring issuance of official victim status in a timely manner and emphasized beginning victim-centered approaches to counter previous delays. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Judges suspended the sentences of nearly half of convicted traffickers and acquitted many defendants because the government did not consistently ensure the continued inclusion of victim testimony after the repatriation of foreign national victims and witnesses throughout multi-year court proceedings. Authorities did not provide services to victims, such as free legal aid or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings, to mitigate the burden of lengthy prosecutions. The government did not consistently screen asylum-seekers and migrants for trafficking indicators and continued to make numerous, sometimes violent, pushbacks against migrants and asylum-seekers, which discouraged potential victims from self-identifying or cooperating with authorities. Some first responders had institutionalized biases that hindered identifying trafficking victims due to their misperception of sex trafficking cases as “only prostitution” or “survival sex” and/or potential forced child begging and forced labor involving Roma as traditional cultural practices and customs. The NRM often only collected statistical information and did not refer victims to housing or other services. Finally, government-run shelters continued to limit access to some victims from needed support, due to a lack of resources and space.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit officials.
- Train first responders on victim identification and referral to increase proactive identification efforts for victims among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, migrants, refugees, individuals in commercial sex, and asylum-seekers.
- Strengthen specialized services including shelter and psycho-social support for all victims, including children, adult males, and victims in rural areas.
- Strengthen rules and regulations to ensure immigration enforcement does not hinder human trafficking detection, criminal law enforcement, or victim protections and institutionalize and implement robust screening procedures for migrant flows, including asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children.
- Decrease the length of court proceedings for trafficking cases and encourage victims’ participation in investigations and prosecutions.
- Reduce the burden of lengthy proceedings by providing alternative methods to testify, such as offering remote testimony or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings.

- Take concrete steps to expedite the victim certification process irrespective of victim cooperation in law enforcement efforts.
- Appoint a national rapporteur on human trafficking and allocate sufficient resources to the Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (ONRHT).
- Develop policies for victim-centered prosecutions and implement witness protection provisions already incorporated into law.
- Provide training to judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement on trafficking investigations and prosecutions, particularly in rural areas and for non-specialized staff.
- Improve measures to order restitution and compensation for victims, including through training prosecutors and judges, asset seizure, and legal assistance.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. Article 323A of the criminal code criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for serious crimes, such as rape. Police investigated 27 cases with 73 suspects, compared with 20 cases with 60 suspects in 2021. The government prosecuted 206 defendants, a decrease compared with 342 defendants in 2021. Courts convicted 163 traffickers, an increase compared with 116 traffickers in 2021. Judges issued 25 sentences ranging from two months to one year and six months' imprisonment, 97 sentences ranging from two years to nine years and six months' imprisonment, 33 sentences ranging from 10 years to 19 years' imprisonment, and eight sentences ranging from 22 years to 60 years' imprisonment. However, judges suspended 42 percent (70) of the issued sentences. Separately, judges acquitted 58 suspected traffickers (42 in 2021). The government improved data collection and trafficking statistics by creating the Office of Justice Statistics in the Ministry of Justice to collect, analyze, and publish crime statistics. In 2021, courts experienced severe administrative and judicial delays due to the pandemic, with the government closing courts from November 2020 to May 2021 and partially closing courts from August 2021 to September 2021. Therefore, during 2022, judges prioritized cases with expiring statutes of limitations and/or cases with defendants about to complete the maximum duration of pre-trial detention. In March 2023, Parliament passed legislation providing for special judicial investigators in first instance courts in Athens and in Thessaloniki dedicated to trafficking cases.

HP maintained an ATU within the Organized Crime Division, composed of two units with 25 officers in Athens and 10 officers in Thessaloniki, who investigated trafficking and vice crimes and 14 smaller units across municipalities that investigated trafficking and organized crime. ATU officers resumed joint inspections with labor inspectors and social workers from the National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA) – after suspending joint inspections due to limited economic activity from lockdown measures – and increased responsibilities to enforce pandemic mitigation efforts; the government conducted 207 joint inspections (347 in 2019). Observers reported ATU's 14 smaller units often consisted of three or four officers to manage trafficking cases, among many other duties, and lacked the resources and staff to conduct proactive investigations. NGOs continued to report good cooperation with law enforcement and excellent cooperation with ATU. Although the government provided training to prosecutors in Athens and Thessaloniki on an ad hoc basis, observers reported non-specialized police, prosecutors, and judges, especially in smaller cities, lacked an understanding of trafficking and victim-centered techniques. The government maintained institutionalized training programs on trafficking at the Police Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, Academy of Judges, the Greek Asylum Service, and the Reception Identification Service. In addition, the government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, asylum officers, coast guard, and municipal employees on various anti-trafficking issues. A court convicted a police officer for various offenses, including trafficking, and sentenced the officer to a five year and six month suspended sentence. Authorities separately arrested a navy officer for sex trafficking. In 2020, media reported authorities investigated 15 police officers affiliated with a gang that provided protection for brothels, casinos, and massage parlors. The

government conducted joint investigations with Moldovan and Spanish authorities and signed a bilateral agreement with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on combating organized crime, including trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government identified 278 victims, a significant increase compared with 130 victims in 2021. Of these, 161 were sex trafficking victims and 117 were labor trafficking victims, including nine victims of forced begging, two victims of forced criminality, and 11 victims of “slavery conditions”; 201 were women and 31 were men; 29 were girls and 15 were boys; and 13 were Greek. HP issued an order for all police to screen vulnerable populations, particularly from conflict zones abroad, for trafficking indicators and included best practices for victim-centered investigations. Observers commended ATU’s ability to consistently identify victims but noted other government efforts were largely reactive and reliant on self-identification; ATU identified 37 victims. According to experts, institutionalized bias shaped the case processing of some first responders. For example, some police officers dismissed cases of sex trafficking as “only prostitution” or “survival sex.” In previous years, some first responders did not distinguish between sex trafficking and commercial sex, rejected sex trafficking victims who self-identified and, at times, sent them back to traffickers. Authorities often did not investigate cases of potential forced child begging and forced labor involving Roma but rather justified them as traditional cultural practices and customs. International organizations, NGOs, and media continued to report a serious lack of government efforts to screen migrants and asylum-seekers, including unaccompanied children, at border crossings. Reports documented Greek authorities violently pushing back migrants and asylum-seekers into Türkiye, while civil society and media alleged border police assaulted and harassed migrants and asylum-seekers, including women and children, which strongly discouraged victims from self-identifying or cooperating with authorities. In 2021, EKKA and the Asylum Service updated SOPs for asylum claims to include specialized procedures if a case officer identified an asylum-seeker as a trafficking victim; however, observers said assessments in the registration stage were often too cursory to identify a victim. The government expedited the registration and screening process of migrants and asylum-seekers at the island Reception and Identification Centers (RIC) but in some cases housed unidentified trafficking victims in the same facility with their traffickers. Each RIC designated a trafficking focal point to collect information on potential trafficking cases, but many staff members working at RICs were on short-term contracts, with limited experience and training to identify victims. In previous years, observers reported a lack of identification efforts for victims of forced labor, particularly in the agricultural sector, cleaning and domestic service, and the tourism industry; however, labor inspectors reported difficulties in conducting inspections in rural areas and on islands due to the community receiving notice before inspections from local citizens.

The government maintained a multi-disciplinary NRM, including appropriate SOPs and referral forms. The NRM required first responders to coordinate with EKKA when potential victims were identified for victim care and placement. Government entities referred 96 victims (37 in 2021), and civil society organizations referred 106 victims (73 in 2021). EKKA trained first responders, immigration officers, social service workers, hospital staff, and asylum officers on victim identification and referral procedures. However, international organizations and NGOs reported the NRM only collected statistical information on victims and did not offer practical solutions with respect to housing and other services for victims. The law mandated a public prosecutor officially recognize a victim based on information collected by law enforcement. Experts reported inconsistent use of recommendations from a psychologist or social worker to inform prosecutors’ certification decisions, and official victim recognition often took years. Official victim status entitled foreign victims to a renewable one-year residence and work permit, although victims without this status still had access to immediate support and assistance. Additionally, the government did not officially recognize victims exploited outside of Greece but who later identified in Greece. In May 2022, the government issued a circular to all prosecutors urging

prosecutors to determine official victim status in a timely manner, based on a victim-centered approach, noting victims need not cooperate with law enforcement to receive official victim status. Public prosecutors granted official victim status to eight victims in 2022, compared with seven victims in 2021.

The government, in cooperation with NGOs, provided shelter, psycho-social support, medical care, legal aid, and reintegration support. The government was unable to determine how much total funding was spent on victim protection and did not allocate funding to civil society, but it provided physical premises to NGOs working with vulnerable children, including trafficking victims. EKKA secured €631,840 (\$675,040) from EU security funds to support the NRM from 2018 to 2022 and maintained an MOU with an NGO to host a legal consultant and two anti-trafficking advisors. Two agencies provided general shelter and support services to trafficking victims: the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) operated 19 shelters and 40 counseling centers for female victims of violence, and EKKA operated two long-term shelters and an emergency shelter for female victims of GBV and two Social Support Centers for vulnerable populations in need of assistance. GSFPGE and EKKA shelters assisted 110 victims (37 in 2021). However, EKKA and GSFPGE shelters continued to deny some victims support due to lack of capacity, resources, or space. For example, government-run shelters did not have space to accommodate some trafficking victims due to an increase in domestic violence victims requiring shelter during the pandemic. Experts reported the government did not transfer trafficking victims identified at RICs to the mainland for victim assistance due to lack of sufficient accommodation. As in previous years, victims in rural areas and islands had little access to support services and were often accommodated in police stations, hospital wards, or received no assistance. Observers continued to report a lack of specialized shelters for victims with only one NGO-run shelter providing specialized assistance for female trafficking victims. The government referred male victims to homeless shelters, which lacked specialized assistance. Government-run shelters, NGO-run shelters, and facilities for unaccompanied children accommodated child victims but did not provide specialized support. The government categorized trafficking victims as vulnerable, unemployed individuals and provided financial incentives to businesses to hire 800 individuals from this category, including subsidies for salaries and social welfare, renewable for an additional year. Victims who did not apply for certified victim status could receive a residence and work permit by applying for asylum or for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. The government issued seven residence permits to trafficking victims from Moldova (three), Russia (two), and Belarus (two) and received an additional 12 applications from victims from Albania, Bangladesh, Belarus, Moldova, Nigeria, and Russia. The process to receive residence permits was more difficult and lengthier for victims without an attorney.

Due to a lack of consistent screening efforts for trafficking indicators in migrant flows, authorities likely detained and deported some unidentified trafficking victims among migrants and asylum-seekers. Although courts prioritized cases with child victims, court proceedings for cases with adult victims often lasted two to six years and the government did not consistently ensure the continued inclusion of victim testimony after foreign national victims and witnesses returned to their countries of origin, resulting in lenient sentences, cases tried under lesser crimes, and acquittals of suspects on trafficking charges due to a lack of other evidence. ATU did not have adequate resources to maintain contact with victims during lengthy prosecutions, and the government did not provide services to mitigate this burden on victims or witnesses, such as free legal aid or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings, thereby further hindering their cooperation. Additionally, some suspected traffickers intentionally postponed court appearances to increase the chances of victims being unable to testify in court, threatened victims and their family members, and/or may have paid repatriated victims to preclude them from testifying. The law entitled victims to have access to mental health professionals during court proceedings and the use of audiovisual technology for remote testimony, but many courts lacked the capabilities to deploy these resources. Some judges did not allow remote testimony because they wanted to examine the victim and the witnesses in-person, even in cases where testimony could cause re-traumatization. The law provided for witness protection and non-disclosure of the witness's personal information; however, no trafficking victims received full witness protection privileges to date, police only escorted victims during trials, and courts often revealed victims' identities during proceedings. Judges have never issued restitution for victims in

criminal proceedings. Greek law entitled victims to file civil suits against traffickers for compensation; however, no victims to date had filed for or subsequently received compensation from traffickers, in part due to their reluctance to wait for a decision in a lengthy court process. The government maintained a compensation fund for victims of crime but reported a trafficking victim has never applied for compensation from the fund.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. ONRHT continued to coordinate government-wide anti-trafficking efforts; however, ONRHT lacked sufficient resources and the position of the National Rapporteur remained vacant after the government appointed the previous rapporteur to another position in December 2021. The government updated and continued to implement the NAP for 2019-2023, but the government did not allocate sufficient resources to its implementation. OHRHT, in partnership with a university, maintained a pilot project to use technology to remotely monitor working conditions of agricultural workers to prevent forced labor. The government maintained a working group of legal and criminal justice professionals to identify gaps in implementation of anti-trafficking legislation. The government organized awareness campaigns targeting children, migrants, the public, and Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's war against Ukraine. The government operated four hotlines, one for female victims of violence, one for individuals in vulnerable situations, one for unaccompanied children, and another for labor infringement and work complaints; hotline calls led to ATU identifying three trafficking victims and arresting 12 suspects. In May 2021, the government took over an EU-funded program providing apartments for asylum-seekers and refugees from UNHCR but ended the program in December 2022, thereby requiring many program participants to vacate their apartments within 24 to 48 hours of notification. Participants became homeless and/or were sent to RICs – subsequently increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. In January 2023, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR), a legally-mandated independent advisory body to the government, launched the "Recording Mechanism of Incidents of Informal Forced Returns." The Mechanism comprised of civil society organizations, in cooperation with UNHCR, and issued an interim report on January 2023 documenting incidents of pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers between April 2020 and October 2022.

ONRHT trained Greek business leaders on trafficking and maintained an MOU with two regional governments to strengthen cooperation on various anti-trafficking efforts, including preventing forced labor in public procurement supply chains. The Hellenic Public Procurement Authority terminated contracts when it identified child labor, forced labor, and/or other forms of trafficking in public procurement. The government provided free airtime for public service announcements for NGOs and agencies on trafficking issues. The government certified and licensed private labor recruitment agencies and prohibited recruitment fees. The government allowed migrant workers with a work permit of one year or longer to change employers, but neither could change their job specialization nor social security provider. The government also allowed seasonal workers to sign a new contract with a different employer or renew their contract. The government signed agreements with the Government of Egypt to allow 5,000 seasonal workers in the agricultural sector and with the Government of Bangladesh to allow 4,000 seasonal workers. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting awareness campaigns targeting potential purchasers of commercial sex.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Greece, and traffickers exploit victims from Greece abroad. Traffickers operating in Greece are

primarily Greeks and other Western and Eastern Europeans, but some are also from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Traffickers subject women and children from Eastern and Southern Europe, South and Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to sex trafficking in unlicensed brothels, on the street, in strip clubs, in massage salons, and in hotels. Victims of labor trafficking are primarily children and men from Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Syria. Traffickers exploit migrant workers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan to debt bondage and forced labor in agriculture. Traffickers force Romani children from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania to sell goods on the street, beg, or commit petty theft. Unaccompanied children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Refugee and migrant women, especially those living in the island RICs, are highly vulnerable to trafficking. NGOs report women in migrant and refugee camps are vulnerable to organized criminal groups who subject them to sex trafficking in makeshift brothels. Most migrants and asylum-seekers rely on smugglers at some point during their journeys; in many instances such smugglers exploit migrants for labor, commercial sex, or participation in criminal enterprise, including participation in human smuggling organizations.