

# 2024 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; therefore, Greece remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing overall law enforcement efforts by investigating and prosecuting more suspected traffickers and issuing fewer suspended sentences and convicting more traffickers. The government identified significantly more victims and prosecutors granted more official victim statuses based on recommendations from a psychologist and social worker. The government established a three-person committee in each court to oversee technological improvements, including the use of audio-visual technology for remote testimony. The government also applied stricter rules for the conditional release of convicted traffickers. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Anti-trafficking unit (ATU) officers lacked sufficient resources and staff to conduct proactive investigations. Although judges issued fewer suspended sentences, judges continued to suspend the sentences of more than a third of convicted traffickers. Authorities did not consistently ensure the inclusion of victim testimony after the repatriation of foreign national victims and witnesses throughout multi-year court proceedings resulting in prosecutors unable to obtain convictions of potential traffickers. 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 conduct pushbacks against migrants and asylum-seekers, which prevented potential victims from self-identifying or participating in criminal justice proceedings. Some first-line responders had institutionalized biases, such as a tendency to view sex trafficking cases as “only prostitution” or “survival sex” and/or forced child begging or forced labor involving Roma as a traditional cultural practice, hindered victim identification. The NRM often only collected statistical information and did not refer victims to housing or other services. 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 trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms. \* Train first responders on victim identification and referral to increase proactive identification efforts for victims among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and individuals in commercial sex. \* 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 migration policies and border management 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 increase protective services for victims participating in criminal justice proceedings. \* 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 participation in criminal proceedings. \* 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 victim-witness assistance 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 36 cases with 126 suspects – 29 cases with 105 suspects for sex trafficking and 7 cases with 21 suspects for labor trafficking – compared with 27 cases with 73 suspects in 2022. The government prosecuted 410 defendants – 262 for sex trafficking, 48 for labor trafficking, and 100 for unspecified forms of trafficking – compared with 206 prosecutions in 2022. The government continued to prosecute 66 defendants for sex trafficking and six defendants for labor trafficking from previous years. Courts convicted 151 traffickers – 136 for sex trafficking and 15 for labor trafficking – compared with 184 convictions in 2022. Judges issued six sentences ranging from two months to eight months' imprisonment, 63 sentences ranging from one year to five years' imprisonment, 38 sentences ranging from five years and five months to nine years' imprisonment, 38 sentences ranging from 10 years to 39 years' imprisonment, and did not report sentences on six traffickers. However, judges suspended 37 percent (54) of the issued sentences, compared with 42 percent (70) in 2022. Separately, judges acquitted 56 suspected traffickers, compared with 58 suspected traffickers acquitted in 2022.

The Hellenic Police (HP) maintained an ATU within the Organized Crime Division, composed of two units with 25 officers in Athens and 12 officers in Thessaloniki, who investigated trafficking and vice crimes and 14 smaller units across municipalities that investigated trafficking and organized crime. In March 2023, Parliament passed legislation providing for special judicial investigators dedicated to trafficking cases in Athens and in Thessaloniki. ATU officers continued joint inspections with labor inspectors and social workers from the National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA); as of August 2023, the government conducted 271 joint inspections amounting to €1,230,500 (\$1,359,670) in fines, compared with 207 joint inspections in 2022. Observers reported ATU officers had many other duties along with investigating trafficking and lacked sufficient resources and staff to conduct proactive investigations, particularly the ATU in Thessaloniki. 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. Prosecutors relied heavily on victim and witness testimony without corroborating evidence, especially for labor trafficking cases. 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 and government officials on various anti-trafficking issues. Authorities investigated a police officer, who remained in custody, for sex trafficking and separately arrested another police officer for various offenses, including trafficking. In 2022, authorities arrested a navy officer for sex trafficking. The government conducted joint investigations with Spanish authorities and participated in EUROPOL operations.

## PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government identified 370 victims, compared with 278 victims in 2022. Of the 370 victims identified, traffickers exploited 216 in sex trafficking and 154 in labor trafficking; 299 were women, 28 were men, 32 girls, and 11 boys; 359 were foreign nationals. The government maintained SOPs containing guidelines for first responders on screening, identifying, and referring victims. Observers commended ATU's ability to consistently identify victims but noted other government efforts were largely reactive and reliant on

self-identification; ATU identified 115 victims (37 in 2022). Observers reported institutionalized biases prevented first responders from identifying some victims. 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, often justifying these crimes 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. Media and civil society reported Greek authorities continued to push back migrants and asylum-seekers into Türkiye. Some reports alleged uniformed Greek officials physically and/or verbally assaulted migrants and asylum-seekers, including women and children, which strongly prevented victims from self-identifying as trafficking victims or participating in criminal justice proceedings. However, in 2022, 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. In 2022, EKKA and the Asylum Service updated SOPs for asylum claims to include specialized procedures should a case officer identify 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 the traffickers. Each RIC maintained a designated trafficking focal point to collect information on potential trafficking cases. However, RICs continued to experience high staff turnover, with many staff members on short-term contracts and had limited experience and training on victim identification. In previous years, observers reported a lack of identification efforts for victims of labor trafficking, particularly in the agricultural sector, cleaning and domestic service, and the tourism industry. Labor inspectors reported difficulties in conducting inspections in rural areas and on islands due to communities receiving notice from local citizens before inspections.

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 331 victims (96 in 2022) and civil society organizations referred 100 victims (106 in 2022). EKKA trained first responders, immigration officers, social service workers, and asylum officers on victim identification and referral procedures. However, international organizations and NGOs reported the NRM only collected statistics on victims and did not refer or coordinate placement of victims to services. The law mandated a public prosecutor could officially recognize a victim based on information collected by law enforcement but official victim recognition often took years. Public prosecutors granted official victim status to 46 victims (eight in 2022). 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 authorities or NGOs 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 participate in criminal justice proceedings to receive official victim status. The law also allowed a psychologist or psychiatrist and a social worker to submit official victim recognition recommendations to prosecutors when victims chose not to participate in criminal justice proceedings. Although prosecutors rarely considered these recommendations, prosecutors in Thessaloniki officially recognized three victims based on psychologist and social worker recommendations, bringing the total number of victims who received official victim status through this process to four.

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 it spent on victim protection and did not allocate funding to civil society, but it provided physical premises and keynote speakers to NGOs assisting vulnerable children, including trafficking victims. EKKA extended its funding of €631,835 (\$698,160) from EU security funds to support the NRM from 2018 to 2023 and secured a secondment of two experts through the

European Union Agency for Asylum. Two agencies provided various shelter and support services that could assist trafficking victims: the General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights operated 20 shelters and 44 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 provided support services to 431 victims (104 victims in 2022). 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. As in previous years, experts reported the government did not transfer trafficking victims identified at RICs to the mainland for victim assistance due to lack of sufficient accommodation. 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 shelters designed for persons experiencing homelessness, which lacked the infrastructure and staffing to support 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 and unemployed individuals and provided financial incentives to businesses to hire 10,000 individuals from this category, including subsidies for salaries and social welfare, renewable for an additional year. However, observers reported a lack of long-term support for trafficking victims, including long-term housing, vocational training, and employment. 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 had 4088 pending applications for residence permits to trafficking victims but did not issue any permits (seven in 2023). 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 suspected traffickers due to a lack of evidence. ATU maintained a victim-centered room in Athens to interview victims but 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. Victims often chose not to participate in court proceedings due to the lack of available victim-witness assistance. 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 audio-visual 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 government established in every court a three-person committee to oversee technological improvements in courts. 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 continued to be occupied by an “acting” rapporteur after the government appointed the rapporteur to another full-time position in December 2021. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Trafficking (the Sub-Committee) monitored developments in anti-trafficking laws and policies; the Sub-Committee met three times. 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, continued to implement 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 professionals, NGO staff, and survivors to identify gaps in implementation of anti-trafficking legislation and policies. The government organized awareness campaigns targeting the public and Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia’s full-scale invasion of 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 violations and work-related complaints; the government did not report the number of hotline calls, compared with hotline calls leading to ATU identifying three trafficking victims and arresting 12 suspects in 2022. 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 would experience homelessness and/or were sent to RICs – subsequently increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. In January 2023, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, 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, issued an interim report in January 2023 documenting incidents of pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers between April 2020 and October 2022.

ONRHT 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 had the authority to terminate 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 Governments of Bangladesh and Egypt to allow 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 exploit women and children from Eastern and Southern Europe, South and Central Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Africa in sex trafficking on the street and in unlicensed brothels, strip clubs, massage salons, and hotels. Victims of labor trafficking are primarily children and men from Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Syria. Traffickers subject 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 sex trafficking. Refugee and migrant women, especially those living in the island RICs, are highly vulnerable to trafficking. NGOs report organized criminal groups may subject women in migrant and refugee camps 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. Traffickers use social media to recruit potential victims and advertise commercial sex through mobile phone applications and online platforms.