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## USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

### 2025 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 more trafficking crimes, convicting more traffickers, and issuing a lower percentage of suspended sentences. The government issued new SOPs and guidance for the Reception and Identification Service, the Hellenic Police (HP), and the Labor Inspectorate on identifying and referring victims. The government began drafting a NAP, conducted robust awareness campaigns, and published a report documenting potential trafficking vulnerabilities associated with pushbacks of migrants and asylum seekers in 2023. 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 courts issued a lower percentage of suspended sentences, courts continued to suspend the sentences of approximately a third of convicted traffickers, which weakened deterrence and did not adequately address the nature of the crime. The government identified fewer victims and failed to provide victim protection at the Closed Controlled Access Centers (CCAC). The government did not consistently screen asylum-seekers and migrants for trafficking indicators, and some first-line responders viewed sex trafficking cases as “only prostitution” or “survival sex” and/or forced child begging or forced labor involving Roma as a traditional cultural practice, which hindered victim identification. The government lacked specialized services for trafficking victims, and

government-run shelters continued to limit access to services for some victims due to a lack of resources and space.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including those involving complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Train officials on the use of established SOPs for the proactive identification efforts of trafficking victims and for the referral of victims to care.
- Ensure front-line officials, including immigration officials, consistently screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and individuals in commercial sex.
- Increase the availability and quality of specialized services, such as shelter and psycho-social support, for all victims, including children, adult males, victims in rural areas, and victims in the CCACs and Reception and Identification Centers (RICs).
- 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 anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Article 323A of the criminal code criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of at least 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. In 2024, police investigated 49 cases with 178 suspects (23 cases for sex trafficking and 26 cases for labor trafficking, including 14 for forced begging and one for forced criminality), compared with 36 cases with 126 suspects in 2023. The government prosecuted 363 alleged traffickers (258 for sex trafficking, 47 labor trafficking, and 58 unspecified forms of trafficking), compared with 487 prosecutions in 2023. Courts convicted 189 traffickers (173 for sex trafficking and 16 for labor trafficking), compared with 156 convictions in 2023. Courts issued 81 sentences ranging from one year and four months to five years and six months' imprisonment, 57 sentences ranging from six years to nine years and six months' imprisonment, 44 sentences ranging from 10 years to 29 years' imprisonment, one sentence of 30 years' imprisonment, and one sentence of 45 years' imprisonment. Courts issued 21 fines ranging from €900 (\$940) to €36,000 (\$37,460) in addition to imprisonment. However, judges suspended 32 percent (61) of the issued sentences, compared with 37 percent (54) in 2023. Separately, courts acquitted 21 suspected traffickers, compared with 56 suspected traffickers in 2023.

The HP maintained a specialized ATU within the Organized Crime Division, composed of two units with 38 officers in Athens and six officers in Thessaloniki, who investigated trafficking and vice crimes, and 14 smaller units across municipalities that investigated trafficking and organized crime. Additionally, the government maintained special judicial investigators dedicated to trafficking cases in Athens and in Thessaloniki. Authorities reported a total of 79,207 inspections, compared to 73,579 in 2023. The 79,207 inspections included joint inspections by ATU officers and labor inspectors; the government conducted 299 joint inspections amounting to €891,450 (\$927,630) in fines, compared with 271 joint inspections amounting to €1,230,500 (\$1,280,440) in fines in 2023. 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. Additionally, the lack of specialization among prosecutors and judges, especially in smaller cities, resulted in a low understanding of trafficking and a lack of victim-centered techniques. Prosecutors relied heavily on victim and witness testimony without corroborating evidence, especially for labor trafficking cases. Court proceedings 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 criminal offenses with lesser penalties, and acquittals of suspected traffickers due to a lack of evidence. The government maintained institutionalized training programs on trafficking at the Police Academy, Diplomatic Academy, Coast Guard Academy, Academy of Judges, and

Greek Asylum Service. In addition, the government, in cooperation with civil society and foreign governments, trained police and government officials on various anti-trafficking issues. Authorities investigated a police officer for sex trafficking, and the government reported arresting, detaining, and suspending police officers involved in providing protection to brothels in exchange for money. The government did not report information on international cooperation but participated in Europol operations.

## PROTECTION

The government decreased victim protection efforts.

The government identified 311 victims, compared with 370 victims in 2023. Of the 311 victims identified, traffickers exploited 156 in sex trafficking and 155 in labor trafficking; 226 were women, 58 were men, 10 were girls, 16 were boys, and one who identified as non-binary; 221 were foreign nationals. The government maintained SOPs containing guidelines for first responders on screening, identifying, and referring victims. The Reception and Identification Service adopted new SOPs for identifying trafficking victims, including guidelines for screening unaccompanied children. Similarly, the Labor Inspectorate created guidelines for identifying labor trafficking, and HP issued guidance on referring victims through the NRM. ATU identified 84 victims (115 victims in 2023), and immigration officials identified 221 victims (146 in 2023). However, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking criticized the dearth of identification and referral efforts at CCACs, particularly among asylum-seekers and migrants. Similarly, authorities at island RICs continued to house some 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 who had limited experience and training on victim identification. Observers continued to report a serious lack of government efforts to screen migrants and asylum-seekers at border crossings, including unaccompanied children. Media and civil society reported fewer cases than in 2023 of Greek authorities conducting pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers into Türkiye. Observers reported some police officers dismissed cases of sex trafficking as “only prostitution” or “survival sex,” and authorities often did not investigate cases of potential forced child begging and forced labor involving Roma, justifying these crimes as traditional cultural practices and customs.

The government maintained a multi-disciplinary NRM, including appropriate SOPs and referral forms. The NRM required first responders to coordinate with the National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA) on victim care and placement. Government entities referred 287 victims (331 in 2023), and civil society organizations referred 109 victims (100 in 2023).

EKKA trained first responders, social workers, asylum officers, and NGO staff on victim identification and referral procedures. However, international organizations and NGOs continued to report 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, and the government did not officially recognize victims exploited outside of Greece. Public prosecutors granted official victim status to 22 victims (46 in 2023). Official victim status entitled foreign victims to a renewable one-year residence and work permit, although victims without official status still had access to immediate support and assistance. The government maintained instructions for prosecutors to determine official victim status in a timely manner, which noted victims need not participate in criminal justice proceedings to receive official victim status, and law allowed a psychologist or psychiatrist and a social worker to submit official victim recognition recommendations; however, prosecutors rarely considered these recommendations.

The government, in cooperation with NGOs, provided shelter, psychosocial support, medical care, legal aid, and reintegration support. The government did not report how much total funding it spent on victim protection, but it provided physical premises to NGOs assisting vulnerable children, including trafficking victims. Observers continued to report a lack of specialized shelters for victims, particularly with the only NGO-run shelter providing specialized assistance for female trafficking victims closing in November 2024. Two agencies provided various shelter and general support services that could assist trafficking victims: the General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights (GSEHR) 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 violence and two support centers for vulnerable populations in need of assistance. GSEHR and EKKA provided support services to 235 victims (431 in 2023). However, EKKA and GSEHR shelters continued to deny some victims support due to lack of capacity, resources, or space. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking reported the government failed to provide adequate victim protection at CCACs. For example, CCACs restricted freedom of movement and did not provide psycho-social support, medical care, legal aid, and appropriate accommodation. Insufficient interpretation services remained an obstacle, and as in previous years, experts reported the government did not consistently 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 or hospitals or received no assistance. 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. 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 official victim status could receive a residence and work permit by applying for asylum or for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. However, the UN reported some asylum officials only considered trafficking as a part of asylum cases when the exploitation took place in the victim's country of origin. The government had 4,088 pending applications for residence permits to trafficking victims and issued permits to 14 victims (none in 2023). The process to receive residence permits was more difficult and lengthier for victims without an attorney. Due to inconsistent screening among migrants and asylum-seekers, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

The government reported 90 victims participated in criminal proceedings, compared with 97 in 2023. 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. 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 or maintained a long waiting list. 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 no trafficking victim had ever applied for compensation from the fund.

## PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts.

ONRHT continued to coordinate government-wide anti-trafficking efforts; however, ONRHT lacked sufficient resources, and the national rapporteur position has remained occupied by an “acting” rapporteur since 2021. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Trafficking (the Sub-Committee) monitored developments in anti-trafficking laws and policies; the Sub-Committee met twice (three times in 2023). ONRHT began drafting a new NAP; the government’s previous NAP expired in 2023. The government organized awareness campaigns targeting the public, the tourism sector, foreign migrant workers, domestic workers, teachers, and banks. The government operated four hotlines that could receive inquiries related to human trafficking – 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; hotline calls led to ATU identifying three potential trafficking victims in 2024 (none in 2023). The Greek National Commission for Human Rights, a legally-mandated independent advisory body to the government, maintained the “Recording Mechanism of Incidents of Informal Forced Returns.” The Mechanism, composed of civil society organizations in cooperation with UNHCR, issued an annual report in June 2024 documenting incidents of pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers in 2023, and noted such incidents prevented adequate screening for signs of trafficking. 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 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 they could not change their job specialization or social security provider. The government also allowed seasonal workers to sign a new contract with a different employer or renew their contract but did not allow migrant workers invited by a specific employer for long-term employment under a residence permit to change employers. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking 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, Greece, 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 smuggling organizations. Traffickers use social media to recruit potential victims and advertise commercial sex through mobile phone applications and online platforms.

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Austrian Red Cross	Wiedner Hauptstraße	Contact
Austrian Centre for	32, 1041 Wien	Imprint & Disclaimer
Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
Asylum Research and	F +43 1 589 00 589	Data Protection Notice
Documentation	info@ecoi.net	
(ACCORD)		

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