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2020 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 to the previous reporting period; therefore Greece remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more victims and standardizing data collection for victim statistics. The anti-trafficking unit (ATU) continued robust investigative efforts, and the government operationalized a multi-disciplinary national referral mechanism (NRM) with appropriate standard operating procedures. Government and civil society representatives reported the government began implementation of the NRM and continued to report excellent cooperation with ATU. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities temporarily suspended asylum applications for the month of March as part of efforts to secure its land border with Turkey, which prevented victims from self-identifying and cooperating with authorities. The government lacked proactive identification efforts for forced labor, and some first responders rejected sex trafficking victims who self-identified and, at times, sent them back to the trafficker. Government-run shelters lacked sufficient capacity, resources, and space to provide assistance and accommodation, with specialized support for victims remaining inadequate or inaccessible. Victims waited up to two years to receive official victim status, and court proceedings often lasted two to six years, which hindered cooperation from victims and key witnesses and resulted in acquittals of suspected traffickers.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase proactive identification efforts for victims of forced labor and victims among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. • Strengthen specialized services including shelter and psycho-social support for all victims, including children, adult males, and victims in rural areas. • Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers. • Decrease the length of court proceedings for trafficking cases. • Encourage victims' participation in investigations and prosecutions by providing alternative methods to testify, including remote testimony or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings. • Take concrete steps to expedite the official victim identification process and fully disconnect official victim status from law enforcement cooperation. • Allocate sufficient resources to implement the national action plan for combating trafficking. • 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. • Train first responders on victim identification and the national referral mechanism. • Standardize data collection and produce accurate data on anti-trafficking efforts. • Improve measures to order restitution for victims, including training prosecutors and judges, asset seizure, and legal assistance.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained 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 25 cases with 148 suspects (28 cases with 136 suspects in 2018); 21 were sex trafficking cases and four were forced labor cases (27 were sex trafficking cases and one was a forced labor case in 2018). The government prosecuted 33 defendants (25 in 2018); 20 for sex trafficking and 13 for forced labor (22 for sex trafficking and three for forced labor in 2018). First instance courts convicted 15 traffickers (14 traffickers in 2018); 11 for sex trafficking and four for forced labor (11 for sex trafficking and three for forced labor in 2018). Courts acquitted 18 individuals for sex trafficking and five individuals for forced begging. Judges issued sentences ranging from four months' to 27 years' imprisonment with fines from €50,800 (\$57,080) to €100,000 (\$112,360), compared with two to 24 years' imprisonment with fines from €10,000 (\$11,240) to €75,000 (\$84,270) in 2018.

The Hellenic Police maintained an ATU within the Organized Crime Division composed of two units with 37 officers in Athens and 10 officers in Thessaloniki who investigated trafficking and vice crimes, and 12 smaller units across municipalities that investigated trafficking and organized crime. ATU officers conducted 347 joint inspections with labor inspectors and social workers from the National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA). ATU regularly inspected brothels, bars, and massage parlors, but observers reported the 12 smaller units often consisted of three or four officers to handle trafficking cases among many other duties and lacked the resources and staff to conduct proactive investigations. ATU, in cooperation with an NGO, created a victim-centered interview room in the Athens police headquarters. NGOs continued to report good cooperation with law enforcement and excellent cooperation with ATU. The government appointed trained prosecutors in Athens and Thessaloniki to handle trafficking cases. The government removed pimping from the criminal code, which police, prosecutors, and judges reported had been used to justify inspections on brothels and to prosecute traffickers when stronger evidence was unavailable. The government maintained institutionalized training programs on trafficking for police, the coast guard, judges, and the asylum service. In addition, the government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, prosecutors, judges, and labor inspectors on various anti-trafficking issues. Observers reported, however, that non-specialized police, prosecutors, and judges, particularly in rural areas and islands, lacked an understanding of trafficking. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking, but authorities reported an ongoing investigation into the wife of a former Greek ambassador accused of conducting domestic servitude in the ambassadorial residence. The government conducted a joint investigation with Italy, shared information with Albanian and Bulgarian authorities, and requested mutual legal assistance from Slovenia.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government identified 150 victims (31 in 2018), some of whom fell into more than one category of exploitation; 111 were sex trafficking victims, 68 were forced labor cases, including 42 cases of forced begging, two cases of forced criminality, and one case of recruitment for armed operations (30 were victims of sex trafficking and one of forced labor in 2018); 116 were female, 28 were male, two were transgender, and no information on four victims (27 female and four male in 2018); 49 were minors (nine minors in 2018); and 126 were foreign victims (26 foreign victims in 2018). The government standardized data collection and, unlike previous years, aggregated and produced all statistics on victim identification from government and civil society stakeholders. Observers commended ATU's ability to consistently identify victims but noted other government efforts were largely reactive and reliant on self-identification. The Hellenic National Public Health Organization and regional asylum officers screened migrants, asylum-seekers, and unaccompanied children for trafficking indicators at island Reception and Identification Centers (RIC); regional asylum offices identified 15 victims (two in 2018). However, asylum-seekers waited longer than a month for their screening due to a lack of staff and resources, resulting in a trafficking survivor re-victimized in a migrant camp while waiting for legal documents and RIC screening procedures. Each RIC designated a trafficking focal point who collected information on potential trafficking cases, but many staff working at RICs were on short-term contracts, which limited their experience and training to identify victims. Civil society and media continued to report incidents in which authorities allegedly assaulted and harassed refugees and migrants, forcibly removing them to Turkey. Greece temporarily suspended asylum applications for the month of March in response to the movement of thousands of people in Turkey to the Greece-Turkey land border in Evros. The border closure prevented victims from self-identifying or cooperating with authorities. Observers reported a lack of identification efforts for victims of forced labor, particularly in the agriculture sector, cleaning and domestic service, and the tourism industry; however, labor inspectors reported the difficulties in conducting inspections in rural areas and on islands due to the community receiving prior notice before inspections from local citizens. Proactive identification among vulnerable unaccompanied children also remained inadequate, including for forced begging and forced criminality. International organizations reported some first responders could not distinguish between sex trafficking and commercial sex, rejected sex trafficking victims who self-identified, and, at times, sent them back to the trafficker.

The government launched a multi-disciplinary NRM, including appropriate standard operating procedures and referral forms. The NRM required first responders to inform and coordinate with EKKA when potential victims were identified for victim care and placement; government entities referred 68 victims and civil society organizations referred 82 victims. The government, separately and in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs, trained law enforcement, immigration officers, social service workers, labor inspectors, and health workers on victim identification and new referral procedures. The law authorized public prosecutors to officially recognize victims based on information collected by law enforcement or a psychologist and a social worker, if a victim did not want to cooperate with law enforcement. However, observers reported inconsistent use of psychologists and social workers for identification procedures; only victims who cooperated with investigations received the status, and procedures could take up to two years for victims to receive official status. Official victim status entitled foreign victims to a renewable one-year

residence and work permit; victims without this status only had access to immediate support and assistance. Additionally, the government did not recognize victims who were exploited abroad but identified in Greece. Of the 150 victims identified by the government, public prosecutors granted official victim status to only two victims, while 25 victims were in the process of receiving official victim status; 44 victims were EU citizens and 24 were Greek citizens who did not need a residence and work permit.

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, with the exception of projects co-financed by the EU and state budget funds. EKKA secured €631,840 (\$709,930) from EU security funds to support the NRM from 2018 to 2022 and maintained a memorandum of understanding with an NGO to host a legal consultant and two anti-trafficking advisors. Two agencies provided shelter and general support services to trafficking victims: the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPG) operated 19 shelters and 42 counseling centers for female victims of violence, and EKKA operated two long-term shelters, an emergency shelter, and two Social Support Centers for vulnerable populations in need of assistance. GSFPG and EKKA shelters assisted 12 victims (nine victims in 2018). However, EKKA and GSFPG shelters rejected some victims from accessing support due to the lack of capacity, resources, and space to provide assistance and accommodation. Victims in rural areas and islands had little access to support services and often were accommodated in police stations, hospital wards, or received no assistance. Observers reported a lack of specialized shelters for victims with only one NGO-run shelter providing specialized assistance for female trafficking victims. Only an NGO-run shelter for sexually exploited men and short-term government shelters for asylum-seekers or homeless persons could accommodate male victims. Government-run shelters, NGO-run shelters, and facilities for unaccompanied minors accommodated child victims but did not provide specialized support. Central and local governments also maintained cooperation agreements with some NGOs to house, protect, and assist vulnerable children, including trafficking victims, and allocated buildings to use as shelters. Observers reported overcrowded facilities for child victims, and authorities held vulnerable unaccompanied children in police cells up to several months due to a lack of shelters. Victims who did not apply for official recognition could receive a residence and work permit by applying for asylum or for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds; the government issued two residence permits (10 in 2018) and renewed an additional 13 for certified victims (13 in 2018); the government did not provide statistics on residence permits or granting of asylum to victims who lacked official recognition. The process to receive residence permits was difficult without an attorney and took time.

The government may have deported, detained, or restricted freedom movement of some trafficking victims due to inadequate identification efforts. Prosecutors relied heavily on victim testimony without corroborating evidence, and court proceedings often lasted two to six years, which hindered cooperation from victims and key witnesses. For example, an appeals court unanimously acquitted 20 traffickers convicted of sex trafficking in November 2018 after the four victims that testified against them in lower courts did not attend court proceedings. The government did not provide funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings, and some suspected traffickers intentionally postponed court appearances to increase the chances of victims being unwilling to testify in court and/or may have paid bribes to repatriated victims to preclude them from testifying. In previous years, observers reported traffickers likely bribed state-certified interpreters to alter the content of victim statements or influence their testimony. The law entitled victims 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 and some judges did not allow it, even in cases where the lack of these benefits could cause re-traumatization. The law provided for witness protection and non-disclosure of the witness' personal information; however, no trafficking victims received full witness protection privileges to date; police only escorted victims during trials; and courts revealed victims' identities during proceedings. Prosecutors did not request restitution for victims in criminal proceedings; no victims to date had received restitution from their traffickers. Greek law entitled victims to file civil suits against traffickers for compensation; no victims to date had received compensation from their traffickers.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (ONRHT) continued to coordinate government-wide anti-trafficking efforts despite lacking sufficient resources. The government reported completing all deliverables for 2019 in the national action plan (NAP) for 2019-2023, monitored anti-trafficking efforts, and made assessments publicly available; however, experts reported the government did not allocate sufficient resources to anti-trafficking efforts and implementation of the NAP. The government developed a national database for victims and organized awareness campaigns targeting the general public, students, teachers, and clergymen. ONRHT, in partnership with an international organization and the Athens municipal government, continued a pilot project to prevent forced labor in local governments' supply chains. The government provided free airtime for public service announcements for NGOs and

agencies on trafficking issues. From January to June 2019, the government conducted 11,628 inspections of businesses. From July to September 2, 2019, under a new government that collected different statistics, the government conducted 12,987 inspections of businesses and identified 1,357 undeclared employees, for which it issued fines totaling €15 million (\$16.9 million). Figures for the number of undeclared workers and fines were not available from January to July 2019. In 2018, the government inspected 3,869 businesses with 5,689 undeclared workers and issued fines totaling €58.9 million (\$66.2 million). Labor recruitment agencies could be subjected to inspection, but the lack of competent staff to conduct such inspections resulted in limited oversight. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting awareness campaigns. The government operated two hotlines: one for female victims of violence and another for individuals in vulnerable situations.

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 some women and children from Eastern and Southern Europe, South and Central Asia, China, Georgia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Russia to sex trafficking in unlicensed brothels, on the street, in strip clubs, in massage salons, and in hotels. Victims of forced labor in Greece are primarily children and men from Africa, Eastern Europe, and South Asia. Migrant workers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan are susceptible to debt bondage, reportedly in agriculture. Traffickers force marginalized Romani children from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania to sell goods on the street, beg, or commit petty theft. An increase in unaccompanied child migrants has increased the number of children susceptible to exploitation. Unaccompanied children, primarily from Afghanistan, engage in survival sex and are vulnerable to trafficking. Refugee and migrant women, especially those living in the island RICs, were highly vulnerable to trafficking. Most migrants and asylum-seekers are believed to rely on smugglers at some point during their journey and in some instances are forced into exploitation upon arrival in Greece.

ecoi.net summary:



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