

# The State of the World's Human Rights; Greece 2025

Criminal proceedings were brought against 21 coast guard officers for the 2023 Pylos shipwreck. An unlawful and discriminatory three-month suspension of access to asylum for people coming to Greece through North Africa was imposed, leading to mass detentions in inadequate conditions. A new law on the return of third country nationals negatively impacted their rights. A felony trial started against 24 humanitarian workers who had assisted people in distress at sea. Reports of unnecessary and excessive use of force against peaceful protesters persisted. A controversial blanket ban was introduced on protests in areas outside the country's parliament. Legislation seeking to combat gender-based violence was criticized for failing to prioritize support and prevention. Four executives of companies linked with the Predator spyware scandal stood trial. Reports of attacks against members of the LGBTI community persisted. Over a quarter of the country's population were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

## Background

Mass demonstrations took place demanding justice and accountability for the victims, survivors and families of those involved in the 2023 Tempi train crash in which 57 people were killed. In February, the Hellenic Aviation and Railway Safety Investigation Agency found that the tragedy was a combined result of human error, poor infrastructure and systemic failures in railway safety management.

Between June and August, amid a severe heatwave made more likely by climate change, major forest fires destroyed tens of thousands of hectares of land, killing one man and damaging houses and essential infrastructure in areas including Crete, Chios, Attika and Achaia.

## Refugees' and migrants' rights

In a landmark ruling in January, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) noted "strong indications" that there had been a systemic practice of unlawful summary returns ("pushbacks") at the land borders with Türkiye in 2019. More cases involving summary returns remained pending before the court. NGOs expressed concern that despite over 200 domestic investigations into alleged summary returns having been launched between 2019 and 2024, none had resulted in charges against officials.

In May, the Naval Court prosecutor concluded the preliminary investigation into the coast guard's role in the 2023 Pylos shipwreck, in which over 600 people died, bringing felony charges against 17 officers and referring them for further investigation. In November, a Court of Appeal prosecutor brought criminal proceedings against four additional senior coast guard officers. Those charged included the crew and captain of the patrol boat that, according to survivors, caused their boat to capsize while attempting to tow it, as well as the head and former head of the coast guard.

In October, the ECtHR ruled in a case concerning a 2018 deadly shipwreck, condemning Greece for violations of the right to life due to shortcomings in both the rescue efforts and the investigation into the incident.

In June, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ceased supervising Greece's implementation of the landmark judgment of the ECtHR, *M.S.S. v. Greece*, which dealt with deficiencies in the country's asylum procedures and in living conditions for asylum seekers. Despite reports by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the UN and NGOs documenting shortcomings, the committee concluded it was satisfied with the progress made by the Greek authorities to comply.

Only a month later, a legislative amendment provided for the unlawful and discriminatory three-month suspension of the submission of asylum applications from people arriving on the Greek islands of Crete and Gavdos through North Africa. It also permitted their forced return to their country of origin or transit. The ECtHR issued interim measures in two cases involving people from Sudan and Eritrea affected by this measure, ordering Greece to refrain from returning them as long as the registration of their asylum claims remained suspended.

People subjected to the new provisions were largely detained across facilities in Greece, in some cases in inadequate conditions. The European Commission failed to use the tools at its disposal to ensure that Greece complied with its human rights obligations.

Throughout the year, asylum seekers living in the EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCAC) on the Aegean islands continued experiencing "restrictions of freedom" amounting to unlawful detention. In February, the ECtHR issued interim measures to protect children in the "safe zone" of Samos CCAC and ensure their relocation.

In September, parliament adopted a new law on the return of third country nationals which reduced the protection of returnees, in parts in violation of existing EU law and standards, and signalled a punitive direction for the country's migration policy. The law criminalized irregular stay, expanded the penalties associated with irregular entry and exit, extended the length of detention beyond EU law limits and introduced electronic surveillance as a measure to reduce the risk of absconding. The law followed and was inspired by a much criticized European Commission return proposal from March which was not yet binding at year's end.

In March, the Council of State annulled the decision designating Türkiye as a safe third country, following a 2024 ruling by the Court of Justice of the EU on the compatibility of such designations with EU law when the country in question has suspended readmission. Türkiye had suspended readmissions since 2020. NGOs expressed concerns that a new ministerial

decision subsequently adopted in April effectively reinstated Türkiye's designation as a safe third country.

## **Human rights defenders**

In June, an Athens court acquitted human rights defender Alexia Tsouni on charges including defamation which appeared to have been brought in response to her anti-racism work and activism in support of refugees.

In December, a felony trial started against 24 humanitarian workers, including Irish human rights defender Séan Binder, who rescued and assisted refugees and migrants on the island of Lesbos. The charges included people smuggling and carried up to 20 years in prison. In the same month, a legislative proposal introduced membership of a registered NGO as an aggravating factor in smuggling cases.

## **Right to life**

In June, a police officer was found guilty for the fatal shooting of Kostas Frangoulis, a 16-year-old Roma boy who had been killed during a police chase in Thessaloniki in 2022.

## **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

Police reportedly used unnecessary and excessive force against protesters and photojournalists in the policing of demonstrations, including those regarding the Tempi rail crash and protests in solidarity with Palestinians. There were also reports of police transferring peaceful protesters to police stations for identity checks prior to and after demonstrations. In July, authorities abused anti-racism legislation to arrest some protesters demonstrating in Rhodes in solidarity with Palestine.

In October, parliament introduced a blanket ban on protests in parts of Syntagma Square in Athens, in front of the parliament building, ostensibly to protect a national monument.

Concerns about long-term impunity persisted, although some law enforcement officials were brought to trial for human rights violations against protesters.

In February, three police officers were found guilty of causing Vasilios Maggos "dangerous bodily harm" outside the courthouse in the town of Volos in 2020. Vasilios Maggos had reported his ill-treatment during his arrest and detention and died a few weeks later. In November, six police officers went on trial on charges of torture, "dangerous bodily harm", exposure to danger and arbitrary detention in relation to the case.

In August, two senior police officers were referred to trial for unlawfully obstructing a lawful protest and attempted serious bodily harm against at least 10 lawyers participating in a protest in March 2021.

## **Right to privacy**

In September, four executives of two companies linked with the Predator spyware scandal stood trial on misdemeanour charges for breaching communications privacy laws. The trial was ongoing at year's end.

## **Violence against women and girls**

In January, a law seeking to combat gender-based violence by criminalizing new forms of violence such as cyberstalking and revenge porn sparked criticism by women's rights groups for its emphasis on stricter penalties rather than prevention and support for victims.

Lawyers, activists and women's rights groups continued to express concerns about the impact of the implementation of the 2021 joint custody legislation on women and children survivors of gender-based violence.

## **LGBTI people's rights**

Reports of attacks against members of the LGBTI community persisted.

In April, parliament adopted legislation effectively excluding same-sex male couples and single men from access to surrogacy.

## **Economic, social and cultural rights**

An October report by the Greek Anti-Poverty Network highlighted that 26.9% of the country's population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion and that child poverty remained high at 22.4%.

A controversial bill adopted in October allowed certain private sector employees to work a 13-hour day on a voluntary basis for up to 37.5 days a year. The law was criticized by trade unions and opposition parties and triggered nationwide strikes and protests.

## **Conscientious objectors' rights**

In December, concerns were expressed about a bill introducing amendments in relation to armed forces failing to recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service in accordance with international human rights standards as the alternative civilian service remained punitive and discriminatory and the assessment of applications for conscientious objection status was still not under the full control of civilian authorities.

## Right to a healthy environment

In November, the World Wildlife Fund highlighted s that Greece's agreements on hydrocarbon extractions with major oil companies and its long-term commitment to import liquefied fossil gas from the USA would lead to decades of dependency on fossil fuels, environmental risk and economic regression.

