



## **Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015 - Greece**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority is vested in the unicameral parliament. On January 25 and September 20, the country held parliamentary elections that were considered free and fair. During the year a coalition government headed by a prime minister led the country. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

The most significant human rights problems during the year were the at times overcrowded and deplorable conditions facing the greatly increased numbers of migrants and asylum seekers who arrived in the country, including a lack of sufficient food, potable water, and adequate shelter at some reception and registration sites, as well as some allegations of physical abuse by police and allegations of attacks by unknown, armed individuals on vessels carrying migrants and asylum seekers. Poor conditions and some reports of abuse of persons incarcerated in detention centers and prisons and societal discrimination and instances of violence against individuals perceived to be foreigners were also significant problems.

Other human rights problems reported during the year included some limitations on access to the asylum application process along with inadequate capacity to provide legal aid and social support for asylum seekers and refugees; some restrictions on freedom of press and religion; domestic violence; incidents of anti-Semitism; trafficking in persons; limits on the freedom of certain ethnic-minority groups to self-identify; discrimination against and social exclusion of the officially recognized Muslim minority in Thrace; discrimination against Roma and exploitation of Romani children; violence and discrimination against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community; and discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV-positive status, and migrant-worker status.

The government took steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses, whether in the security services or elsewhere in the government.

### **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

## **a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

## **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibit such practices and provide safeguards for criminal suspects and undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in detention, but there were reports that police and Coast Guard personnel mistreated and abused undocumented migrants and asylum seekers and prison and detention center inmates (also see section 2.d., Refugee Abuse).

In May the trial of 13 prison guards and a prison director charged in the March 2014 death of an Albanian convict was postponed after the defense cited legal constraints; the trial resumed December 16. On March 26, a judicial council decided to release, under strict conditions, the six guards remaining in pretrial detention after 12 months. The media reported the issuance of suspended prison sentences to law enforcement officials for beating a foreign national at the Thessaloniki airport in 2011 and, separately, for physically abusing a Greek national with a mental disorder during his detention in 2007. On June 4, the alternate minister of citizen protection ordered a formal investigation into accusations that Coast Guard officers allegedly marked serial numbers on the arms of newly arrived migrants and potential asylum seekers to the island of Crete.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison and detention center conditions, including holding cells, did not always meet national or international standards. Problems included inadequate supplies of material resources such as blankets, clothing, and hygiene products; inadequate diet and sanitation; lack of access to health care and medical treatment; and lack of recreational activities.

Physical Conditions: Prison overcrowding was reduced over the course of the year. As of November, the Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights stated the prison population was 9,749, down from 11,988 in November 2014 and below the capacity of prison system, which was 9,886 inmates. Authorities reportedly detained underage migrants in the same quarters as adults.

On several occasions, inmates conducted hunger strikes and protested overcrowding and poor conditions in prisons and detention facilities. On February 28, a prosecutor ordered a preliminary investigation into the living conditions for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers detained at the Amygdaleza migrant detention center following one death and two suicides early in the year. The government subsequently ended prolonged detention of undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers. On March 3, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Doctors without Borders

reiterated criticism regarding the harmful impact of long-term detention under poor conditions on the physical and mental health of detained undocumented migrants and asylum seekers.

Administration: Independent authorities investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent nongovernmental observers to monitor prison and detention center conditions.

Improvements: The government took several administrative and legislative measures to address severe overcrowding and poor living conditions in prisons, prison hospitals, holding cells, and detention centers. In late February the government began the gradual release of undocumented migrants without public security concerns from detention centers to relieve overcrowding and release those detained longer than 18 months.

On April 27, parliament passed a law that provides for the early release or release to home detention of categories of prisoners who meet certain criteria involving the amount of time of their sentence served, their age, and the presence of serious health problems or a disability. The severity of their crime, however, is not taken into consideration. Ministry of Justice data indicated that, through June 15, some 1,795 prisoners were released under these provisions. Of those, 1,400 were prisoners released under time-served provisions, 367 were migrants who were detained pending deportation, and 18 were minors or inmates with physical disabilities. The legislation also provides for drug detoxification programs in prison for convicted drug offenders and offers leniency and flexibility to drug offenders under certain circumstances.

On May 11, as a measure to reduce overcrowding, the government initiated a pilot project to provide electronic monitoring of qualifying inmates, including 150 pretrial detainees, 50 adult detainees, and 50 minors.

## **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, there were reports that police at times abused their arrest and detention authority.

### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

Police are responsible for law enforcement, border security, and the maintenance of order under the authority of an alternate minister for citizen protection, who is subordinate to the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction. The Coast Guard is responsible for law and border enforcement in territorial waters under the authority of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Island Policy. The armed forces, under the authority of the Ministry of Defense, and police jointly share law enforcement duties in certain border areas. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police, Coast Guard, and armed forces, and the government had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption.

There were reports of impunity involving security forces. In June the media reported that in 2014 the Hellenic Police Internal Affairs Unit investigated 25 complaints of “extreme behavior” by law enforcement officials, including 20 acts involving migrants. Cases opened against law enforcement

officials in 2014 included 90 related to wealth acquisition, 30 to breach of duty, 18 to abuse of authority, 15 to participation in a criminal organization, 15 to weapons and explosives violations, 11 to perjury, 10 to fraud, and 10 to blackmail and harboring criminals.

In a May 6 report the Racist Violence Recording Network stated that 21 of the 81 incidents of racist violence it recorded in 2014 involved law enforcement officials. Six of the incidents reportedly occurred in detention facilities. The government maintained a hotline for reports of racially motivated acts, and special police units were responsible for combating and preventing racist violence. According to official data for 2014, those units investigated 80 potentially racially motivated incidents and referred 57 of them to prosecutors, while the special hotline received 27 telephone calls.

Police and Coast Guard personnel received intercultural and human rights training from universities, NGOs, international organizations, and service academies.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law requires judicial warrants for arrests, except during the commission of a crime, and prohibits arbitrary arrest. Police did not always follow these provisions. Within 24 hours of detention, the law requires police to bring detainees before a magistrate, who must issue a detention warrant or order the detainee's release; authorities generally observed these provisions. Pretrial detention may last up to 18 months, depending on the severity of the crime, or 30 months in exceptional circumstances. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial. Expedited procedures may be applied to individuals accused of misdemeanors. Bail is available for defendants detained on felony charges and on lesser charges unless a judicial officer deems the defendant a flight risk.

Authorities generally respected the law allowing detainees to contact a close relative or third party, consult with a lawyer, and access medical services. Since police are required to bring detainees before an examining magistrate within 24 hours of detention, the short time period allegedly limited the ability of detainees to present an adequate defense. Defendants may request a delay to prepare a defense.

The Hellenic League of Human Rights reported instances in which foreign detainees had limited access to a court-appointed interpreter, or were unaware of their right to legal assistance. Only indigent defendants facing felony charges received legal representation from the bar association. NGOs provided limited legal aid to some detained migrants and asylum seekers.

Arbitrary Arrest: In early February the government announced the end of large-scale police sweeps of public spaces that led to the temporary detention of individuals presumed to be undocumented migrants, allegedly based on their physical appearance.

On May 6, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report based on interviews conducted with 44 individuals in central Athens in 2014 and 2015, including homeless persons, drug users, and sex workers. The respondents alleged frequent stops by police for identity checks and detention for several hours without charges. Some described verbal and physical abuse by police and alleged they had been targeted based on physical appearance.

Pretrial Detention: Prolonged pretrial detention remained a problem. As of November, approximately 27 percent of the country's total prison and detainee population consisted of persons in pretrial detention. On May 11, the government initiated a pilot project to provide electronic monitoring of qualifying inmates, including 150 pretrial detainees (see section 1.c.). Courts were overburdened and understaffed, and litigation often proved to be a lengthy process. In contrast to 2014, there were no reports that authorities failed to separate pretrial detainees from prisoners.

Protracted Detention of Rejected Asylum Seekers or Stateless Persons: In late February the government began the gradual release of undocumented migrants, including rejected asylum seekers who did not pose public security concerns, from detention centers to relieve overcrowding and to release those detained more than 18 months.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. NGO observers reported the judiciary was at times inefficient and sometimes subject to influence and corruption.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The law grants defendants a presumption of innocence, and defendants have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges. Delays were mostly due to backlogs of pending trials and understaffing. Trials are public in most instances, and most felony cases use juries. The law permits denial of a jury trial in cases of terrorism. Defendants have the right to be present at trial and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. The government provides attorneys to indigent defendants facing felony charges. Defendants may present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf as well as question prosecution witnesses. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases and have the right of appeal. Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to a court-appointed interpreter, although some NGOs and the media criticized their quality and availability.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

The judiciary was generally independent and impartial in civil matters. The law provides citizens with the ability to sue the government for compensation for alleged violations of rights. The government recognizes sharia (Islamic law) as the law regulating family and civil concerns of the Muslim minority of Thrace. Muslims married by a government-appointed mufti are subject to sharia family law. Members of the Muslim minority also have the right to civil marriage and to take cases to civil court.

## **f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution and law prohibit such actions. In contrast to 2014, there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Speech and Press**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and press.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech but specifically allow restrictions on speech and sanction individuals who intentionally incite others to actions that could provoke discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups, based on their race, color, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability or who express ideas insulting to persons or groups on those grounds. Authorities invoked these provisions at least three times during the year. In one example, authorities in May arrested an individual for incitement to hatred after he posted racist comments online with regard to rescue operations of undocumented migrants.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. The law permits a prosecutor to order the seizure of publications that insult the president, offend any religion, contain obscenity, advocate the violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military secrets. The National Radio and Television Council, an independent regulatory agency, supervised radio and television broadcasts. The law requires television stations to broadcast at least 25 percent of their programming in Greek. The law allows the government to exercise immediate control over radio and television stations in case of national emergency and establishes ownership limits on media frequencies.

Legislation passed April 29 grants the minister of state power to dissolve public and private mass media outlets under conditions established by prior laws. This law also re-establishes the state broadcasting service and provides guidelines for its broadcasts.

In July media outlets expressed concern about attempts to intimidate the independent media through criticism by members of the governing coalition and by the formation of a government investigative committee. The government established the committee to investigate allegations of media bias in coverage of the July 5 national referendum on a proposed bailout agreement with the country's creditors. On July 6, a trial court prosecutor opened a preliminary investigation into polling done prior to the referendum and its use by television stations ahead of the referendum. The media reported that, on December 21, the prosecutor referred the case to a council of appeals court judges,

having concluded further action on his part would constitute a breach of articles of the constitution relating to personal freedom and freedom of the press.

On October 24, parliament adopted a new law regulating the licensing system for private television broadcasts, outlining a process for issuance and revocation of television licenses and auction of existing licenses. The law mandates the number of employees each television station must hire, sets operating capital requirements for companies' eligibility to bid on licenses, and precludes companies with tax arrears and major public-sector contracts from bidding on the licenses.

On December 24, parliament adopted a law that revises procedures for making a complaint for moral damage against the press or media, eliminates minimum financial compensation levels for such damages, and provides a framework for the courts to set compensation levels.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists were subjected to arrest, physical attack, harassment, and intimidation due to their reporting. Police opened investigations into several cases.

On June 17, the media reported that an Athens appeals court convicted a police officer of assault on a photojournalist covering a protest rally in 2011. The officer received a three-month suspended prison sentence, reducing the trial court's penalty by five months. The union of photojournalists noted this was the first conviction of a police officer for attacking and injuring a media representative.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: In contrast to 2014, there were no reported instances of censorship and content restrictions.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law provides criminal penalties for defamation. In two separate cases, two members of the government filed lawsuits against journalists. On March 27, the media reported the defense minister sued a cartoonist and an opposition party leader for one million euros (\$1.1 million) each, claiming he was libeled in an article. The same day, another minister sued a newspaper for not issuing an apology for an article alleging that the minister would receive a 12-percent commission from formerly fired civil servants if they were rehired. The review of both cases by the courts remained pending.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. According to the country's national statistics agency, approximately 63 percent of the population used the internet as of March 2014.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

On March 18, media reported that a public prosecutor in Crete pressed charges against a university professor for allegedly denying World War II Nazi war crimes in a book. The trial began November 25.

## **b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

## Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right.

## Freedom of Association

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations of nationals who self-identified as ethnic Macedonians or associations that included the term “Turkish” (see section 6). On July 9, the European Court of Human Rights, reiterating a 1998 decision, ruled that the state was in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights for its refusal to officially register the Home of Macedonian Civilization association. The court awarded the association a total of 12,000 euros (\$13,200) in damages and court costs.

## c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

## d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

The Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction continued to suspend deportation of Syrian refugees and issue free-of-charge, six-month permits that allowed them to stay in the country. The permits were renewable without charge every six months (dependent on the situation in Syria). Migrants of six other nationalities (Iraqi, Yemeni, Palestinian, Eritrean, Somali, and Sudanese) also received six-month permits upon arrival and registration. Depending on the point of entry, however, some members of these nationalities at times received permits of only one month. All other undocumented arrivals received one-month permits, with the expectation they would either apply for asylum or depart the country within that period.

In-country Movement: Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, once registered by authorities, receive a document that technically prohibits them from traveling to certain border areas or ports. Those restrictions were rarely enforced.

On July 9, parliament adopted a new law regulating the status of non-EU foreign nationals recruited to work in the country as seasonal workers (see section 7.b.). The law also reduces the minimum consecutive residency period in the country required for undocumented migrants to be eligible to

apply for a residency permit from 10 to seven years, such applications being judged on the applicant's strong ties to the country.

Amendments to this law grant a residency permit on humanitarian grounds to non-EU nationals in the following categories: victims of human trafficking not covered by existing antitrafficking laws; victims and key witnesses to criminal acts, including racist crimes or incitement to violence on the basis of hatred; victims of domestic violence; those deemed as working under "abusive labor terms;" parents of Greek national minors; incapacitated adults, provided their "return to a safe environment is impossible;" minors who fall under the guardianship of Greek nationals or legal residents; victims of labor accidents; and orphan minors hosted by government shelters. The law also provides that periods of absence from the country should not obstruct the renewal of a residency permit.

### Protection of Refugees

During the year many countries in the EU and Southeast Europe experienced an unprecedented wave of migration from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, consisting of a mix of asylum seekers/potential refugees, economic migrants, and trafficking victims, among others. For simplicity, this report will refer to these populations as "migrants and asylum seekers" if more specific information is not available.

During the year arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers from outside the region, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, increased dramatically, stretching the ability of authorities to provide protection and basic services. UNHCR estimated that, as of December 31, 851,319 migrants and asylum seekers arrived during the year, the vast majority by sea to the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros. The Hellenic Coast Guard reported that it rescued more than 90,000 refugees and migrants during search and rescue operations in the Aegean Sea through November 21. Based on Hellenic Coast Guard data, UNHCR reported that 246 migrants and asylum seekers died and 149 were missing in the country's territorial waters during the year. Observers noted that these figures included persons who died from injuries sustained at sea or hypothermia as well as those who drowned.

According to the International Organization for Migration, 4,256 migrants and asylum seekers crossed the Greek-Turkish land border through December 18. The large number of arrivals in late summer and early fall overwhelmed government resources and resulted in a lack of facilities and qualified reception personnel and interpreters. The unwillingness of many of these persons to apply for asylum in the country made identification of potential refugees and asylum seekers difficult. Greece was predominantly a transit country for migrants and asylum seekers; most sought to depart the country quickly via the northern border for destinations elsewhere in Europe.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government established a system for protecting refugees. Since 2013 the government has had an autonomous, civilian-staffed asylum service under the authority of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction. The system functioned concurrently with the old police-operated system, with plans to phase out the old one after the police adjudicate a backlog of cases. The law requires decisions on asylum to be issued within 90 days; under the new system; authorities asserted that they respected this timeframe. The law provides that applicants are to have access to certified

interpreters, may appeal negative decisions to the appeals authority, and may be detained but not deported.

Through UNHCR-assisted briefings and distribution of multilingual leaflets and information packages, authorities, with the assistance of international organizations and NGOs, informed undocumented migrants awaiting registration as well as non-EU foreign national detainees about asylum procedures, their rights, and International Organization for Migration-assisted voluntary return programs. According to governmental and nongovernmental sources, many of those entering Greece were reluctant to file asylum claims in the country. Through December 31, the asylum service reported that 13,197 individuals applied for asylum.

NGOs and activists expressed concerns about problems related to the asylum system, including the lack of adequate staff and facilities; problems with registration of claims and examination of appeals; lack of permanent reception centers to address the increased number of potential asylum seekers entering via the maritime border; insufficient welfare, integration, counseling, legal, and interpretation services; discrimination; poor detention conditions and the continued detention of some asylum seekers who applied for asylum after having been detained. Asylum seekers of nationalities other than Syrian alleged delays in the processing of their claims due to the expedited processing of Syrian applications under a special program instituted in August 2014.

The First Reception Service, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Migration, managed four facilities: one reception center in the Evros region, one on the island of Lesbos, and two mobile units on the islands of Lesbos and Samos. The First Reception Service receives migrants and asylum seekers, as well as non-EU nationals who are arrested or detained due to illegal entry into the country. The First Reception Service provides services in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs, including identification, registration, information on rights and obligations, medical screening, sociopsychological support, and referrals for vulnerable persons such as unaccompanied minors.

Migrants and asylum seekers also sought registration and processing in order to receive the documentation that allowed them to obtain ferry tickets for the Greek mainland but were not forcibly detained in these registration facilities. NGOs and international organizations expressed concern that the migrant reception process was overwhelmed by the huge numbers of arrivals, impacting conditions for migrants and the ability to identify vulnerable individuals for referral. In October the government agreed to open five “hotspots” for refugee and migrant registration in conjunction with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EU Border Agency (Frontex), the EU Police Cooperation Agency (Europol), and the EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (Eurojust) to improve registration and processing. As of December 31, the hotspot in Lesbos was operating in permanent facilities, while hotspots in Chios, Samos, and Leros were operating in temporary facilities.

The government ended prolonged detention of undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers, implementing existing national and EU laws, which provide that such detentions should last up to six months and be used as a measure of last resort. Undocumented non-EU foreign nationals (other than Syrians, Iraqis, Eritreans, Yemenis, Sudanese, Palestinians, or Somalis, who received six-month permits) arriving in the Greek islands were given a one-month deadline to depart the country (effectively, to deport themselves) once apprehended at the border and registered. If such migrants were apprehended after these deadlines, authorities detained them and issued them deportation

orders. In cases where deportation orders were postponed, they were granted a six-month extension to depart following regular appearances before police authorities. Based on media sourcing police data, approximately 1,400 migrants were in detention centers through the beginning of June compared with approximately 6,000 reported in February 2014. According to police data, a total of 20,868 migrants were deported or returned voluntarily to their home countries between January and December 31.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country adheres to the Dublin III Regulation, according to which authorities may return asylum seekers to the EU member state of first entry for adjudication of asylum claims.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Refugee Abuse: There were unconfirmed reports that the Hellenic Coast Guard was involved in disabling or turning back boats with migrants and asylum seekers aboard. In one mid-November incident in which its personnel were alleged to have purposefully punctured a dinghy carrying migrants and asylum seekers, the Hellenic Coast Guard issued a statement categorically denying that allegation, stating that a Hellenic Coast Guard vessel had been engaged, with a Turkish Coast Guard vessel, in a rescue operation of a boat carrying migrants and asylum seekers.

Several human rights groups alleged that police abused asylum seekers arriving by land from Turkey. In one example reported by HRW, on October 7, police allegedly kicked and hit members of a group of 20-25 Iraqis, including children, and forced them across the border into Turkey after they had been expelled from Bulgaria, allegedly stealing cell phones and more than \$20,000 in cash. In mid-October a Thessaloniki prosecutor ordered a probe by the police internal affairs department in northern Greece to establish whether there had been instances of abuse of power, breach of duty, robbery, or any other offenses in up to 20 separate cases where border guards in Evros allegedly robbed undocumented migrants and refugees and sent them back to Turkey. In several cases, police authorities opened investigations into allegations of physical abuse of migrants by law enforcement authorities, in some instances suspending those involved.

Amnesty International reported that in early September its staff witnessed a group of 15-25 persons brandishing bats physically attack refugees and threaten activists on the island of Kos, while shouting “go back to your countries” and other slurs.

During the year HRW, other NGOs, and the media, including CBS News, reported allegations of unidentified armed individuals in black masks (balaclavas) bearing no insignia and operating in unmarked vessels, who attacked, disabled, punctured, or towed often overcrowded inflated rubber dinghies carrying migrants and asylum seekers away from Eastern Aegean islands on multiple occasions during the second half of the year. On October 22, HRW released a report, *Greece: Attacks on Boats Risk Migrant Lives*, which documented eight such incidents, including four on one day in early October, based on alleged eyewitness accounts or survivor testimonies. Government authorities investigated these reports but did not identify or arrest perpetrators of the alleged attacks. Authorities also reported that they did not find any credible evidence or confirmation to link any official Greek government organization with these alleged activities. In at least one instance,

migrants and asylum seekers reported that the Hellenic Coast Guard intervened to prevent such an attack.

NGOs and independent experts noted a number of specific deficiencies related to undocumented migrants, including at times overcrowding in registration facilities and hotspots, and the prolonged detention of unaccompanied minors, often with adults, due to lack of space in specialized shelters and inability to transport minors to such shelters appropriately. Unaccompanied minors were not always properly registered, at times lacked safe accommodations or legal guardians, and were vulnerable to homelessness, and labor and sexual exploitation. According to National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA) data, the agency dealt with 831 referrals of unaccompanied minors needing shelter between January and June.

In August on the island of Kos, media and NGOs reported that migrants and asylum seekers remained on Kos for three weeks or longer as they awaited processing. In one incident on August 11, approximately 2,000 migrants and asylum seekers, including women and children, reportedly were locked in a stadium overnight on Kos without access to hygiene facilities, shade, or shelter. Doctors without Borders denounced the treatment by authorities in a press release.

Employment: Discrimination against noncitizens in the labor market, lack of sufficient legal protections against exploitation, and abusive working conditions persisted.

In a February 24 report, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that irregular migrants, if not detained, were left to fend for themselves without any social protection or right to work. On November 25, a joint ministerial decision by the ministers of interior and administrative reconstruction; finance; development and tourism; and labor, social insurance, and social solidarity provides for the granting of six-month work permits to non-EU foreign nationals whose deportation orders had been temporarily revoked or revoked on humanitarian grounds.

Access to Basic Services: Services such as health care, education, and housing were granted to asylum seekers in possession of a valid residency permit. According to EKKA data, authorities satisfied approximately 89 percent of shelter requests from asylum seekers between January and June. UNHCR noted the shelters lacked standard operating procedures and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

NGOs and independent experts described conditions in which authorities processed undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in temporary registration facilities upon arrival in the country as deplorable and poor, specifically criticizing unsuitable and overcrowded facilities, lack of adequate food, unsanitary conditions, lack of potable water, and limited access to medical care and treatment. In its August 25 report, HRW noted that the reception centers for processing migrants and refugees fell significantly below international standards and could amount to inhuman or degrading treatment. Children frequently were held with adults in severely overcrowded and dirty conditions. In one example, HRW reported that, during a visit in May, nearly all persons it interviewed on the island of Kos asserted that authorities provided little food and some said they had not eaten in days.

Following the greatly increased numbers of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in the country during the late summer and fall, the government increased processing capacity by allocating additional resources and police staff to improve conditions in the registration centers and reduce wait times for registration. In addition, they began construction of five migrant and refugee

processing “hotspots” operated in conjunction with EU agencies, along with the provision of additional reception spaces in which migrants and asylum seekers could shelter. The government participated in a European Commission-funded UNHCR rental subsidy program launched on December 14 to increase reception capacity. NGOs and local government officials reported that some irregular migrants continued to shelter in public spaces and in derelict building in Athens.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees and provided it to approximately 167 persons as of November 30.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens exercised that ability.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: On January 25 and September 20, the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair.

Political Parties and Political Participation: An unknown number of Roma were believed not to be registered to vote.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were no laws or cultural practices preventing women from participating in political life. There were four members of the officially recognized Muslim minority of Thrace in the parliament. There were no minority members in the cabinet.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not always implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. NGOs and other observers expressed concern over perceived high levels of official corruption. Permanent and ad hoc government entities charged with combating corruption were understaffed and underfinanced.

A December 2014 law does not allow high ranking officials, including the prime minister; ministers, alternate, and deputy ministers; parliament deputies; European Parliament members; general and special secretaries; regional governors and vice governors; and mayors and deputy mayors to benefit from more lenient sentences in cases involving official bribes.

On March 19, parliament passed legislation that abolished the post of national coordinator for combatting corruption, replacing it with a General Secretariat for Combatting Corruption (GSCC). The GSCC is responsible for developing and implementing a national anticorruption strategy, with

an emphasis on coordination between anticorruption bodies within various ministries. A minister of state for combatting corruption was appointed to the cabinet following elections in January and given oversight of government efforts to combat corruption and economic crimes. The minister drafted coordinated plans of action and monitored their implementation, and was given operational control of the Economic Crime division of the Hellenic Police, the Financial and Economic Crime Unit, the ministries' internal control units, and the Health and Welfare Services' inspection body. In the new cabinet announced following September 20 national elections, the cabinet post of minister of state for combatting corruption was abolished, and those duties were assigned to the alternate minister for combatting corruption in the Ministry of Justice.

Legislation passed May 11 provides a wider range of disciplinary sanctions against government employees accused of misconduct or breach of duty, while eliminating the immediate suspension of an accused employee prior to the completion of legal proceedings. If found guilty, offenders could be deprived of wages for up to 12 months and forced to relinquish their right to regain a senior post for a period of one to five years. Certain offenders could also be fined from 3,000 to 100,000 euros (\$3,300 to \$110,000).

Corruption: The government intensified efforts to combat tax evasion by increasing inspections and cross-checks among various authorities; however, media alleged instances of complicity by tax officials in tax evasion by individuals and businesses. Reports of official and police corruption continued. The police bureau of internal affairs conducted investigations and took numerous disciplinary measures, including dismissal and suspension, against officers involved in corruption. On January 18, the Ministry of Administrative Reform announced 133 government officials were dismissed during the last four months of 2014 on various criminal and administrative grounds, including solicitation of bribes, inaccurate statements of wealth acquisition, and other reasons.

On March 24, a special court in Athens sentenced a former finance minister involved in the mismanagement of a list of more than 2,000 citizens with foreign bank accounts to one year of prison, suspended for three years. He was convicted of a misdemeanor for tampering with an official document and was acquitted on the charge of breach of faith.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires income and asset disclosure by appointed and elected officials, including nonpublic sector employees, such as journalists and heads of government-funded NGOs. Several different agencies are mandated to monitor and verify disclosures, including the General Inspectorate for Public Administration, the police internal affairs bureau, the Piraeus appeals prosecutor, and an independent permanent parliamentary committee. Declarations were made publicly available. The law provides for administrative and criminal sanctions for noncompliance. Penalties range from two to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of from 10,000 to one million euros (\$11,000 to \$1.1 million).

In December an Athens appeals court sentenced a former finance minister and his wife to four years in prison, a 10,000-euro (\$11,000) fine, and 20,000 euros (\$22,000) each in damages for failing to declare 1.3 million euros (\$1.4 million) in their 2009 tax returns. The prison sentence is convertible to a payment of 10 euros (\$11) per day.

The General Secretariat for Public Revenues' internal affairs department and other competent authorities found discrepancies between the declared income and actual assets of some government

employees following inspection of their wealth statements. Those cases were referred to the Ministry of Justice for further action.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for the right to access government-held information, with the exception of cases pertaining to national security or privacy. NGOs and media observers noted that bureaucratic delays sometimes hindered access to information.

## **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights**

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman, considered independent and effective, investigated complaints by individuals of human rights problems. Five deputy ombudsmen dealt with human rights, children's rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality of life problems. The office received adequate resources to perform its functions. In its 2014 annual report, the office reported receiving 16,339 complaints, of which 80.4 percent were considered to have been resolved satisfactorily for the affected citizens.

The autonomous, government-funded National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) advised the government on protection of human rights. The NCHR was considered independent, effective, and adequately resourced.

## **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

The constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on race, sex, religion, political beliefs, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, language, and HIV-positive status. A law adopted on December 24 establishes a National Council against Racism and Xenophobia, an advisory body under the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights aimed at preventing, combatting, monitoring, and recording racism and intolerance, and protecting individuals and group of individuals targeted due to their race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The law stiffened penalties for individuals convicted of crimes motivated on those grounds. While the government generally enforced these provisions, some societal discrimination continued against women, persons with disabilities, migrants, Roma, HIV-positive persons, and LGBTI individuals.

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime. Penalties range from five to 20 years' imprisonment. Domestic violence is a crime with penalties of from two to 10 years' imprisonment. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively. Conviction rates for rape were low for first-time offenders, but sentences were robust for repeat offenders. According to police statistics, survivors reported 108 cases of rape in the first nine months of the year, a reduction of approximately 12 percent compared with the same period in 2013. Data on prosecutions, convictions, and prison sentences for rape and domestic violence crimes were unavailable.

According to the secretary general for gender equality, police, and NGOs, domestic violence, including spousal abuse, continued to be a problem. NGOs reported long delays in trial procedures prior to a final verdict. In December the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) reported that its hotline for female victims of violence received more than 18,000 calls from March 2011 to December 2014.

The government and NGOs made medical, psychological, social, and legal support available to rape survivors. EKKA operated a hotline that provided referrals and psychological counseling for individuals in need of help. The government operated 21 shelters for victims of violence and 25 counseling and support services centers. The GSGE also oversaw 15 separate centers in each governing region. The GSGE reported the state budget and EU funds would provide approximately 3.6 million euros (\$4 million) to 52 projects administered by women's rights NGOs from 2013 to the end of 2015. On July 14, the GSGE signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Culture, Education, and Religious Affairs for joint awareness-raising projects on gender equality for teachers at the preschool and primary school levels.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides penalties ranging from two months to five years in prison. Of the gender-equality complaints handled by the ombudsman in 2014, approximately 7 percent involved sexual and other harassment. The ombudsman noted the absence of a policy against sexual harassment in most businesses and workplaces, private and public, underlining that employers were often ignorant of their obligations under the law when employees file sexual harassment complaints.

Reproductive Rights: The government generally respected the right of couples and individuals to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; to manage their reproductive health; and to have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equality between women and men. Women enjoy the same legal status and rights as men under family, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance laws, with exceptions related to the practice of sharia law involving the Muslim minority of Thrace.

Women occupied 27 percent of senior private sector positions. Based on data from the European Commission in January, the average share of women in the boards of the largest listed companies registered in Greece was 8.9 percent. According to European Commission data released in November, the overall gender earnings gap in the country was 45.2 percent.

According to the International Labor Organization, the country's economic crisis had a disproportionate impact on women. Based on data released in May by the country's Manpower

Employment Organization, an independent agency of the Ministry of Labor, 61 percent of registered unemployed persons seeking employment were women.

The government recognizes sharia applied by muftis as the law regulating family and civic matters for the Muslim minority of Thrace, with local courts routinely ratifying the muftis' decisions. Muslims married by a government-appointed mufti are subject to sharia family law. Members of the Muslim minority also have the right to a civil marriage and the right to take their cases to civil court. Muslim women in Thrace may choose to be subject to sharia as interpreted by official muftis. The NCHR advised the government to limit the powers of muftis to religious duties because they might otherwise restrict the civil rights of citizens. The media reported that, on March 14, the Supreme Court upheld a prior sharia law ruling from 2013 rejecting civil law provisions in an estate case. The court ruled that the deceased individual's sister-in-law, under sharia law in Thrace, could claim part of her brother's real estate property even though he had named his wife as full beneficiary in his public will and testament filed in a civil court.

## Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from one's parents at birth; a single parent may confer citizenship on a child. Parents are obliged to register their children within 10 days of birth. The law allows belated birth registration but imposes a fine. Birth registration takes place at the municipal level. Parents of children who were not born in private or public clinics or hospitals may submit written statements from two witnesses to confirm their parentage.

On July 9, the parliament amended the law granting citizenship to migrant children born in the country; the previous legislation was deemed unconstitutional by a Council of State decision in 2013. Under the amendment, children born to foreign parents in the country and abroad can apply for citizenship, contingent upon the parents' legal status in the country and tied to certain educational requirements for the child. For example, a child born in the country to a parent who resided legally in the country for five years prior to the child's birth qualifies for citizenship upon enrollment in school. A child born in the country or abroad to parents not legally resident qualifies for citizenship either upon completion of the first nine consecutive years of compulsory education; six consecutive years of education at the equivalent of middle and high school level (grades 7-12); or after completing the equivalent of a Greek high school diploma and a university bachelors' degree from a Greek university or technical school. The law also provides non-EU foreign nationals not legally resident in the country the opportunity to obtain renewable one-year residency permits if they are parents of a minor Greek national.

Education: Romani children continued to face discrimination in education (see National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities, below).

Child Abuse: Violence against children, particularly street and Romani children and undocumented migrants, remained a problem. The law prohibits corporal punishment and mistreatment of children, but government enforcement was generally ineffective. Welfare laws provide for treatment and prevention programs for abused and neglected children as well as for alternative family care or institutionalization. Government-run institutions were understaffed, however, and NGOs complained of insufficient places for all children who required alternate placement. Media reported that, through July 29, the NGO Smile of the Child received child abuse reports involving 811 children and provided shelter to 397 abused children.

On April 27, the parliament passed legislation that included antibullying provisions and amended the penal code to provide prison sentences for persons convicted of causing bodily or mental harm to minors as a result of continuous cruel behavior. Adults convicted under the statute may receive a minimum of six months' imprisonment if they are the guardian of or have a working or educational relationship with the victim. Minors who are convicted are eligible for therapy or placement in a rehabilitation center if there is less than three years' age difference with the victim.

According to the UN Children's Fund and local NGOs, exploitation of Romani children by their parents was a problem. In the majority of cases, these children were forced to beg or sell small items on the streets. Government efforts to prevent such exploitation were inadequate.

On July 30, the NGO Smile of the Child and the Hellenic Police signed a memorandum of cooperation to support the efficient handling of cases of children in danger, including victims of domestic violence and negligence, economic and sexual exploitation, and cybercrimes, as well as missing children.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage is 18. While official statistics were unavailable, NGOs reported that child marriage was common in the small Romani community, with Romani girls often marrying between the ages of 15 and 17 (some as young as 13) and Romani boys marrying between the ages of 15 and 20.

State-appointed muftis in Thrace noted that the marriage of children under the age of 15 was not allowed and that marriages involving minors between the ages of 16 and 18 required a prosecutor's decision. There were a limited number of marriages of children under 18 in Athens and among the Muslim minority, performed with the permission of a prosecutor.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: On December 24, the law was amended to establish 15 as the legal age of consent. The law criminalizes sex with children under the age of 15. In cases where a victim is under 10, there is a mandatory sentence of at least 10 years' imprisonment; if the victim is between the ages of 10 and 13, up to 10 years' imprisonment. If the victim is between ages 13 and 15, the court determines the length of imprisonment. The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and imposes penalties if the crime was committed using information and communications technology accessed from the country. Authorities generally enforced the law with harsher penalties of up to life imprisonment and a fine of up to 500,000 euros (\$550,000). During the first half of the year, police investigated 51 internet child pornography cases.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's country-specific information at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/greece.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/greece.html).

## **Anti-Semitism**

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish community consisted of approximately 5,000 individuals. Anti-Semitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs. The Central Board of Jewish Communities also expressed concern about anti-Semitic attitudes among representatives of a number of political parties, including the defense minister appointed in January. On January 12, the secretary general for

religious affairs issued a press release explaining in detail “the legal status and the taxation of the Greek Jewish communities and institutions” in response to anti-Semitic views expressed in parliament and social media portraying Greek Jews as avoiding taxation. On September 23, the deputy minister of infrastructure, transport, and networks resigned on the day of his appointment following media controversy over anti-Semitic remarks previously expressed on his social media accounts. The Central Board of Jewish Communities also expressed concern about political cartoons and images in mainstream media that purported to equate financial negotiations with the country’s creditors with the Holocaust.

Anti-Semitic incidents included desecration of Holocaust monuments in central Athens and in the city of Kavala. Before the memorial in Kavala was unveiled, the Central Board of Jewish Communities stated that local authorities asked for the Star of David on the monument to be removed, or the dedication would be canceled. The secretary general of the Ministry of Culture, Education, and Religious Affairs criticized the actions of Kavala municipal authorities. Police reportedly responded quickly to reports of vandalism. Some government officials condemned anti-Semitism and participated in Holocaust remembrance events.

On January 9, the Secretariat for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs announced a competition for student video productions on the Holocaust and Greek Jews, with winners receiving an educational trip to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and State Museum in Poland in cooperation with the Jewish Museum of Greece.

In June media outlets reported that a court convicted an alleged Golden Dawn supporter in Thessaloniki in connection with the vandalism of the local Jewish cemetery in 2010. He was found guilty of possession of a firearm and sentenced to eight months in prison, suspended for three years. A second perpetrator was sentenced to 15 months in prison without the right to appeal. Two minor accomplices were referred to juvenile court.

In October a small neo-Nazi group, Combat 18 Hellas, vandalized a Jewish cemetery in Athens, spraying graffiti with anti-Semitic messages and swastikas over the entrance. In a statement claiming responsibility for the act, the group stated that it had “made artistic renovations” to the cemetery and had “left the graves for next time.”

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, and access to health care. It provides for other government services, such as transportation and education. NGOs and organizations for disability rights reported that government enforcement of these provisions was uneven.

In its concluding observations on the country adopted on November 3, the UN Human Rights Committee noted with concern discrimination faced by persons with disabilities, in particular with regard to access to education, employment, and health services. The committee also expressed

concern at reports indicating the continuing widespread use of physical restraints, including enclosed restraint beds (cages/net beds), and systematic sedation as a means of restraining patients with intellectual disabilities, including children, in institutions.

Persons with disabilities, including children, continued to have poor access to buildings, transportation, and public areas. The law mandates access for persons with disabilities to buildings as well as accessible transportation and ramps for sidewalks and public transportation vehicles. In response to a question tabled in parliament on May 14, the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction reiterated findings that 9 percent of public buildings were fully accessible and that 40 percent were partly accessible. While the law allows service animals to accompany blind individuals in all mass transit and eating establishments, blind activists maintained that they occasionally faced difficulties when attempting to enter some restaurants with service animals.

NGOs and other groups supporting rights for persons with disabilities criticized government cuts in health care funding for such persons, the lack of qualified personnel to provide health and educational support to children with disabilities, the lack of social welfare support for migrants with physical disabilities, and the lack of quality education and appropriate educational support services at all levels. In May the NGO ActionAid estimated that only 15 percent of the country's children with disabilities attended school. In October the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor noted that the practice of physically restraining patients with mental disorders was still in use in psychiatric institutions.

In 2014 the ombudsman handled 50 complaints related to persons with disabilities. In his 2014 antidiscrimination report, the ombudsman maintained that the law was not completely compatible with the rights of children with disabilities in education and support services sectors. The report also noted that during the 2013-14 school year authorities did not allocate any funds in the state budget to cover for the salaries of 4,008 substitute teachers who provided special education services to children with disabilities. Funding was provided through EU structural funds, which the ombudsman stated did not guarantee future funding for special education programs within the state budget.

On July 2, parliament adopted legislation with provisions intended to benefit persons with disabilities and streamline the office charged with certifying disability and issuing relevant certificates. These measures reduced wait times for the issuance of disability certificates from as much as a year to three months.

The Manpower Employment Organization continued to offer EU- and government-funded programs to enhance the employability and entrepreneurship of individuals with disabilities, including subsidies for employers of such persons and subsidies for new businesses run by them.

## **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

While the constitution and law prohibit discrimination against members of minorities, Roma and members of other minority groups continued to face discrimination and harassment.

Although the government recognized an individual's right to self-identification, many individuals who defined themselves as members of a minority group found it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture. A number of citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks,

Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites, or Macedonians. Some members of these groups unsuccessfully sought official government identification as minorities or linguistic minorities. Use of the terms Tourkos and Tourkikos (Turk and Turkish) is prohibited in the titles of organizations, although individuals may legally call themselves Tourkos. Government officials and courts denied requests by Slavic groups to use the term Macedonian in identifying themselves, stating that more than two million ethnically (and linguistically) Greek citizens also used the term Macedonian in their self-identification.

The government officially recognized a Muslim minority, as defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, consisting of approximately 100,000-120,000 persons descended from those Muslims residing in Thrace at the time of the treaty's signature and including ethnic Turkish, Pomak, and Romani communities. Some Pomaks and Roma claimed that members of the Turkish-speaking community pressured them to deny the existence of a Pomak or Roma identity separate from a Turkish one and alleged that some Turkish-speaking community members provided monetary incentives to Pomak and Roma community members to self-identify as Turkish. On February 24, the ECRI published its fifth report on the country. According to the report, the ECRI received complaints from representatives of the Muslim minority about the low number of members of the minority employed in the civil service in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, especially in decision-making positions. The ECRI also noted that only two schools in the Thrace region provided secondary bilingual education for minority children in Greek and Turkish.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination, social exclusion, and harassment, including alleged abuse or mistreatment while in police custody, regular police raids and searches of their neighborhoods, discrimination in employment, limited access to education, and segregated schooling. In its February report, the ECRI described persistent segregation of Roma in housing and education.

Authorities excluded many Romani settlements from municipal planning ordinances, preventing the legal construction of schools and other infrastructure. Citing 2013 data from the International Romani Network following a study conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, the ECRI reported that some 80 percent of unauthorized Romani settlements and 20 percent of combined unauthorized/permanent Romani settlements were not connected to the national power grid. In addition, many unauthorized Romani settlements were not connected to the water supply system and had no sewage facilities. NGOs and Romani community representatives reported that government efforts to address these problems and enforce the law were inconsistent, especially at the municipal level. Municipal authorities occasionally demolished such settlements or threatened forced evictions. The Greek Helsinki Monitor reported that authorities in Patras conducted a series of forced evictions in June without providing alternative accommodation for the persons who were displaced. In its antidiscrimination report for 2014, the ombudsman identified Romani settlements in Chalandri (Attica), Atalanti, and Lamia that had been relocated or were about to be relocated to distant locations lacking basic infrastructure.

In his 2014 antidiscrimination report, the ombudsman examined 75 discrimination cases submitted by Roma or their legal representatives, 35 from 2014 and 40 pending from previous years. The ombudsman also reported on 53 separate pending cases, mostly concerning housing problems, reiterating that municipal planning authorities levied disproportionate fines on Roma for establishing makeshift homes without permits. The ombudsman highlighted the case of Karditsa municipality, where Roma filed 188 appeals of fines imposed by the local municipal planning

services. In 94 of the 95 cases reviewed, authorities rejected the appeal; the remaining 93 appeals were pending review. According to the ombudsman, the local municipality failed to supply additional data as requested.

Poor school attendance, illiteracy, and high dropout rates among Romani children remained problems. Authorities did not enforce the mandatory education law for Romani children, and local officials often excluded Romani pupils from schools or sent them to Roma-only segregated schools. Government projects to attract Romani children to education had very limited success. The government operated 29 employment support centers throughout the country for Roma and other vulnerable populations. The ombudsman reported on indirect employment discrimination against Roma (see section 7.d.).

On August 14, the Greek Helsinki Monitor submitted a report to the Athens trial court prosecutor documenting official complaints of discrimination against Roma, primarily involving housing and education, on which investigations were stalled. In October the NGO reported that the prosecutor had not taken action to address the complaints.

UNHCR, local media, and NGOs continued to report racially motivated attacks on migrants by far-right groups, including members of Golden Dawn, whose members of parliament publicly expressed anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and homophobic views. On April 20, the trial of 69 far-right Golden Dawn members, including 18 current and former members of parliament, commenced on weapons charges and for running a criminal enterprise.

Courts issued prison sentences over the course of the year on cases relating to attacks on foreigners. On September 24, the media reported that in April an Athens court handed down life sentences to two men accused of murdering a 27-year-old Pakistani laborer in 2013, ruling the victim was killed due to his appearance, religion, national and ethnic origin. The ruling reportedly marked the first time that a trial court had explicitly factored a racist motive into sentencing a defendant.

In April the Racist Violence Recording Network presented data documenting 49 incidents involving racially motivated violence in 2014, three of which it attributed to mixed motives, including ethnic origin. Of the incidents, 23 were linked to extremist groups. Attacks against refugees and migrants represented the majority of incidents. Observers believed the actual number of incidents was higher and criticized law enforcement and judicial officials for inadequately investigating racial factors in such attacks.

## **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Some antidiscrimination laws do not specify sexual orientation or gender identity. Violence against LGBTI individuals remained a problem, and societal discrimination and harassment were widespread. A law adopted December 24 provided same sex cohabitating couples the right to enter into civil union partnerships and repealed a provision in the penal code that established a higher age of consent for homosexual men. On December 24, the law was amended to establish 15 as the legal age of consent, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Prior to the amendment, the legal age of consent was 15 for heterosexual sex and 17 for sexual intercourse between men; the law did not specify an age of consent for sex between women.

In its 2014 report, the Racist Violence Recording Network documented 29 victims of attacks based on sexual orientation. The network also recorded 10 victims of violence due to gender identity, including two incidents allegedly involving law enforcement officials as perpetrators. Police ordered a preliminary investigation in at least one of these cases. The network highlighted as “encouraging” the assistance rendered by police to the transgender victims in the reported attacks.

While the law includes sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating circumstances in hate crimes, crimes targeting sexual orientation or gender identity are not expressly included in the official mandate of offices combating racist violence. LGBTI activists alleged that authorities were not motivated to investigate incidents of violence against LGBTI individuals. In response to continuing complaints by the ombudsman and LGBTI rights associations citing a lack of hate crimes training for police, particularly relating to gender identity and sexual orientation, 19 police officers and four staff members of the ombudsman’s office participated in a two-day training session on October 26-27 on “racist crimes, hate crimes, and their handling by the police” conducted by the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Lesbian and Gay Community of Greece, and the Greek Transgender Support Association NGO.

The Greek Transgender Support Association criticized discrimination against transgender individuals in education and employment, which led to limited access to housing and medical care (see section 7.d.).

The only way a person may obtain a formal change of gender identity in their identification documents is to undergo a gender reassignment operation, followed by an additional administrative legal process with a court.

For the first time, the Athens Metro transit system provided advertising space for the 11th annual Athens pride parade in June. The National Radio and Television Council accepted the Athens pride request to have its television advertisement broadcast as a social message, making it free of charge. Government officials, including the speaker of parliament; the secretary general for transparency and human rights at the Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights; and the mayor of Athens attended the event and addressed participants. For the fourth time, a gay pride parade under the auspices of the local mayor took place in Thessaloniki in June. The local Orthodox metropolitan issued a statement opposing the parade.

In May and June the Greek Transgender Support Association denounced verbal and physical attacks against three transgendered women in separate incidents in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Evia. Police opened an investigation into the incident in Athens, in which the alleged perpetrator shot and wounded the victim with a hunting rifle. In August the media reported that unknown persons physically and verbally attacked a gay couple Thessaloniki; the local police unit for combatting racist violence opened an investigation into the case. The association criticized authorities for lack of proper investigation of the incident in Evia.

## **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

While the law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment of HIV-positive individuals, societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, including employment discrimination, remained a problem. Persons with HIV/AIDS were exempt from serving in the armed forces on medical grounds. A presidential decree provides for the lay-off of professional military staff

members from service for certain medical reasons, including if a member diagnosed with AIDS does not respond to therapy. The NGO AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power reported one instance of a military staff member being dismissed in June under this provision. There was one report of employment discrimination on the grounds of HIV/AIDS during the year (see section 7.d.).

On May 13, three NGOs, Positive Voice, the Center for Life, and Programs of Development of Social Support and Medical Cooperation (PRAKSIS) criticized a government member of parliament for asserting in a television interview that HIV can be transmitted through saliva.

On April 17, a decision by the Ministry of Health abolished a health regulation that allowed authorities to publish identification details of women suspected of prostitution and detain and force them to undergo HIV tests, after a committee of health experts deemed that it unfairly stigmatized members of vulnerable social groups.

On July 9, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the state violated articles of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning inhuman or degrading treatment, prohibition of discrimination, and right to an effective remedy in the case of 13 HIV-positive individuals held in the Korydallos prison hospital. The court awarded 12,500 euros (\$13,800) to each plaintiff in damages and court costs.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right of workers, with the exception of members of the military services, to form and join independent unions, conduct their activities without interference, and strike. The law does not allow trade unions in enterprises with fewer than 20 workers and places restrictions on labor arbitration mechanisms. The law also generally protects the right to bargain collectively but restricts the right to bargain collectively on wages for persons under the age of 25. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and requires reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law allows company-level agreements to take precedence over sectoral-level collective agreements in the private sector. Civil servants negotiate and conclude collective agreements with the government on all matters except salaries.

There are some legal restrictions on strikes, including a mandatory four-day notification requirement for public utility and transportation workers and a 24-hour notification requirement for private sector workers. The law mandates minimum staff levels during strikes affecting public services. Police have the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike. The law also gives authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order is obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempts individuals with a documented physical or mental disability from civil mobilization. In May the government amended the laws prohibiting strikes during national emergencies. The new law explicitly prohibits the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strike actions before or after their proclamation. The government did not issue any civil mobilization orders during the year.

The government generally protected the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties for violations of laws on freedom of association and collective bargaining reportedly were insufficient to deter violations in all cases. Courts may declare a strike illegal for reasons including failure to respect internal authorization processes and secure minimum staff levels, failure to give adequate advance notice of the strike, and introduction of new demands during the course of the strike. Unions complained this deterred some members from participating in strikes. Courts declared strikes by tour bus drivers and mobile telephone network employees illegal on a few occasions. Administrative and judicial procedures to resolve labor problems were generally subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

There were reports of antiunion discrimination. The General Confederation of Workers and Employees (GSEE) and the Union of Workers and Employees in Metal Industries in Attica criticized three separate cases of what they viewed as illegal dismissals of active union members.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor and provides additional protections for children, limiting their work hours and their work under certain conditions. Although several government entities, including the police antitrafficking unit, worked to prevent and eliminate labor trafficking, there were reports of forced labor of women, children, and men in the agricultural sector and of forced begging (also see section 7.c.). Penalties for violations included more than 10 years in prison and fines of up to 100,000 euros (\$110,000) but were not sufficient to deter violations.

Legislation passed July 9 added a new article to the immigration code that facilitated the issuance of residency permits to non-EU foreign nationals for “humanitarian reasons.” The article was intended to protect individuals not otherwise covered under labor trafficking laws, as long as they are granted victim recognition status by a public prosecutor.

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The minimum age for employment in the industrial sector is 15, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age is 12 in family businesses, theaters, and cinemas. A presidential decree permits children who are 15 or older to engage in hazardous work in certain circumstances.

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties for violators ranging from fines to imprisonment. Employers generally observed child labor laws in the formal economy. Trade unions, however, alleged that enforcement was inadequate due to the inspectorate’s understaffing. The government did not adequately protect exploited children.

Child labor was a problem in the informal economy. Younger family members often assisted families in agriculture, food service, and merchandising on at least a part-time basis. Family members compelled some children to beg, pickpocket, or sell merchandise on the street or trafficked them for the same purposes. The government and NGOs reported the majority of such beggars were indigenous Roma or Bulgarian, Romanian, or Albanian Roma. The NGOs

Association for the Social Support of Youth and PRAKSIS estimated that, between January and March, approximately 240 children were working or begging in the streets of Thessaloniki. There were reports that unaccompanied migrant children were particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation and worked mainly in the agricultural and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing sectors.

## **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment based on race, sex, religion, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, and HIV-positive status. The government did not always effectively enforce these laws and regulations. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, social origin, and HIV-positive status. There was discrimination against migrant workers (see section 7.e.).

In March the ombudsman reported an overall increase in reported cases of gender discrimination in public sector employment in 2014. Most reported cases involved illegal dismissal from employment and changes in work terms imposed by the employer due to pregnancy. Of 50 complaints of disability-related discrimination filed with the ombudsman in 2014, 14 cases concerned discrimination in employment. The ombudsman stated in a report to the Ministry of Administrative Reform and to the Manpower Employment Organization that the requirement for a middle-school certificate to obtain employment constituted indirect discrimination in employment for Roma in unspecified sectors.

The Greek Transgender Support Association criticized discrimination against transgender individuals in overall employment, which the association stated led to limited access to housing and medical care. On April 21, the NGO Positive Voice criticized the dismissal of an HIV-positive employee after 10 years of service in a private company. The NGO alleged that the dismissal took place after the employee submitted a sick leave request identifying HIV infection as the reason.

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

The national minimum wage in the private sector for persons age 25 or older was 26.18 euros (\$28.80) per day and 586.08 euros (\$645) per month. The minimum wage for persons under age 25 was 84 percent of the minimum wage of workers older than 25, or 22.83 euros (\$25.10) per day and 510.95 euros (\$562) per month. The government determines public sector salaries, including the minimum wage, without negotiating with civil servant unions.

The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of one month per year, and sets limits on the amount of overtime work. The law regarding overtime work requires premium pay, and employers must submit information to the Ministry of Labor for authorization. Premium pay ranged from 20 to 75 percent of the daily wage, based on the total number of extra hours and the day (Sundays, holidays, nights, etc.). Employers also provided compensatory time off.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety. The country has very complex safety and health laws, consisting of more than 2,600 laws and presidential decrees. Workers have the right to file a confidential complaint with the Labor Inspectorate regarding

hazardous working conditions and to remove themselves from such situations without jeopardizing their employment.

On May 8, six workers were severely injured in a fire at a Hellenic Petroleum refinery in Aspropyrgos, Attica, resulting in four deaths. The company's investigation reported that fuel in the reservoir pipeline during maintenance caused the fire. The findings of Fire Brigade and Labor Inspectorate investigations have not yet been made public.

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor legislation. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for all concerns regarding occupational safety and health at the national level. The General Directorate of Working Conditions and Health and the Labor Inspectorate are the principal competent government authorities. The inspectorate's mandate includes the private and public sectors, except for domestic employment, mining, and marine shipping (which fall under the Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism and the Ministry of Maritime and Island Policy). The GSEE characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate.

The number of inspectors authorized to conduct labor inspections reportedly exceeded 1,000, including Labor Inspectorate personnel and staff of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Social Solidarity, the Social Insurance Fund, and the Economic Crimes Division of the police. No data was available on the number of dedicated labor inspectors in the Labor Inspectorate. Trade unions and the media alleged that, due to insufficient inspectorate staffing, enforcement of labor standards was inadequate in the shipping, tourism, and agricultural sectors. Enforcement was also lacking among small enterprises (employing 10 or fewer persons). In March the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Social Solidarity reported that in 2014 authorities conducted inspections of 27,635 businesses in all sectors and fined them 64.6 million euros (\$71.1 million) for employing undeclared workers. Authorities verified the employment status of 135,566 workers and found 6,177 undeclared workers.

In June the GSEE's Institute of Labor published research which estimated that 14.5 percent of work was undeclared, compared with more than 40 percent in 2013. The institute attributed the reduction to employer manipulation of technicalities in the labor law to avoid penalties that include fines of 10,550 euros (\$11,600) for each undeclared employee. The GSEE asserted that the penalties were not sufficient to deter violations. Institute of Labor data also indicated that approximately 1.2 million individuals experienced delays of up to 15 months in receiving their salary. Other reported labor violations included payment of partial wages for full-time work, nonpayment of holiday pay, nonissuance of benefits, conclusion of contracts for below-minimum-wage part-time work, employment for up to 30 consecutive days of work without weekends off, and delays in payments due to capital controls imposed in June 28. Such violations were mostly noted in the tourism, security, and housekeeping services sectors.

In 2013 the Labor Inspectorate estimated that more than 35 percent of migrants received salaries below the minimum and did not have social security coverage. While wages are officially the same for local and non-EU foreign workers, there were numerous reports that employers paid such workers below the minimum wage.

Legislation passed on July 9 regulates the status of non-EU foreign seasonal workers recruited to work in the country. The law outlines the requirements for setting of work contracts, requires proof

of adequate shelter for workers and imposes a 1,500 euro (\$1,650) fine for employers found not to provide this, requires prepayment of at least one month's worth of social security for each employee, provides basic labor rights to each worker, and prohibits employers from recruiting workers if found to have previously recruited workers through fraudulent means. The law also stipulates that daily wages for non-EU foreign seasonal workers cannot be less than that of an unqualified worker. The law grants seasonal non-EU foreign workers the same rights as citizens with respect to minimum age of employment, labor conditions, the right to association, unionism, collective bargaining, education and vocational training, employment consultation services and the right to certain goods, services and benefits under conditions. The same law also provides that non-EU nationals who are victims of abusive conditions or labor accidents could be eligible to apply for a residency permit on humanitarian grounds.