

The State of the World's Human Rights; Greece 2024

Right to life

In July an appeals court in the capital, Athens, upheld the guilty verdict on two men for lethal bodily harm in relation to the death of LGBTI activist Zak Kostopoulos in September 2018.

In August a prosecutor in Chania charged four police officers with intentional homicide with possible malice in relation to the case of Kostas Manioudakis, who died during a stop-and-search operation in the village of Vryses in Crete in September 2023.

In September migrant worker Kamran Ashiq died in police custody. Pictures of his body published in the media showed injuries indicating he had been beaten. In December, the national police complaints mechanism announced that it had started its own investigation into the case.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Deadly shipwrecks continued, as did reports of human rights violations, including summary unlawful returns by Greek law enforcement officers, against racialized asylum seekers and migrants at borders.

In January, ruling in a case from 2014 – in which the coastguard fired shots towards a boat during an interception at sea, hitting a Syrian man who later died – the European Court of Human Rights found Greece in violation of the right to life, both regarding the investigation of the incident and the use of lethal force.

Despite the ruling, officials' use of firearms during border control operations remained of concern. In July a man died after the coastguard fired shots at a boat during a pursuit operation off Symi.

In December the preliminary domestic investigation into the actions of the authorities in the June 2023 Pylos shipwreck – in which over 600 people died – was finally completed. Survivors had claimed that the Greek coastguard was responsible for the incident. NGOs representing survivors and victims' families criticized the prosecution's failure to summon to provide written explanations those authorities responsible for coordinating the search and rescue operation and their superiors. In May, in separate proceedings which raised fair trial concerns, nine survivors were acquitted of charges, including causing the shipwreck.

Asylum seekers living in the EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) on the island of Samos, mostly racialized individuals, were routinely subjected to "restrictions of freedom" amounting to unlawful detention. There were also shortcomings in the provision of basic services in the CCAC, including running water and healthcare. Those deprived of their liberty may have experienced inhuman and degrading detention conditions, especially during times of overcrowding.¹

Similar concerns relating to other CCACs were made public by the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee (CPT) in July, following their 2023 visit.

The system of containment implemented on Samos and other CCACs disproportionately affected racialized people and furthered the racialized exclusion of migrants and refugees.

In October the Court of Justice of the EU ruled on a case concerning the readmissions of asylum seekers from Greece to Türkiye under the 2014 EU-Türkiye readmission agreement, which Türkiye had suspended since March 2020. The court found that if the country of return did not ensure readmission, asylum applications could not be rejected as inadmissible under the “safe third country” rule.

There were negative developments in access by asylum seekers and refugees to social and economic support. The Helios programme, run by the International Organization for Migration with funding from the Greek authorities, ceased on 30 November. It had provided housing and other support to beneficiaries of international protection and EU temporary protection. The NGO Refugee Support Aegean reported that from May the authorities had stopped paying the financial assistance owed to asylum seekers by law.

Human rights defenders

In January, 16 aid workers involved in search and rescue operations for refugees and migrants were acquitted of misdemeanour charges, including espionage, by a court on Lesbos.

Concerns remained about the criminal charges ongoing against Panayote Dimitras, spokesperson of the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor, and Tommy Olsen, head of the NGO Aegean Boat Report, in relation to their work assisting refugees and migrants at Greece’s borders. Panayote Dimitras remained subjected to restrictive measures, including a ban on leaving Greece, as part of this investigation. In May, the authorities issued a national arrest warrant for Tommy Olsen.

In August an NGO criticized further judicial harassment against Panayote Dimitras who, together with his wife Nafsika Papanikolatu, faced a criminal investigation for alleged breach of trust and money laundering.

In November, concerns were raised about the trial of human rights defender Alexia Tsouni, on charges including “false testimony” and defamation, which appeared to be in response to her anti-racism work and activism in support of refugees.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Reports persisted of the police using unnecessary and excessive force, including by misusing less-lethal weapons, against protesters and journalists.

In December, human rights lawyer Anny Paparousou and a group of peaceful protesters were taken to a police station for identity checks ahead of a demonstration. This move appeared to be unlawful, and aimed primarily at preventing the protesters from participating in the protest.

In October a court awarded compensation to photojournalist Orestis Panagiotou for the serious injury he sustained after being hit directly and at close range by a water cannon while covering a demonstration in Athens in 2021. In November, an Athens court handed an eight-month suspended prison sentence to a police officer found guilty of causing bodily injury by negligence to Orestis Panagiotou.

Freedom of expression

Greece had yet to introduce an effective legislative framework to tackle strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).

In September an Athens Court heard the appeal of journalist Stavroula Poulimeni and media cooperative Alterthess against a ruling that partially accepted a 2021 lawsuit following their

reporting on a case relating to environmental damage. The 2021 lawsuit was considered to bear the hallmarks of a SLAPP.

In October an Athens court dismissed a 2022 defamation lawsuit by Grigoris Dimitriadis, the prime minister's former chief of staff, against three journalists including Thanasis Koukakis and the media outlets Newspaper of Editors and Reporters United, in relation to an investigative article on Greece's surveillance scandal. Press freedom NGOs characterized the lawsuit as a SLAPP.

Right to privacy

In January the European Court of Human Rights found that Greece had breached the right to a private life after authorities in 2012 disclosed identities and medical data of women diagnosed with HIV.

In July, serious concerns were expressed by opposition parties, civil society and lawyers representing victims of unlawful surveillance after an investigation by the Prosecutor's Office of the Supreme Court concluded that there were no links between the unlawful use of Predator spyware and state ministries or agencies.

Violence against women and girls

In April, Kyriaki Griva was murdered by her former partner outside an Athens police station where she had gone to seek protection. The handling of her complaint by police caused an outcry and led to the investigation of four police officers for the offence of "exposing a person's life to risk".

In November the UN Human Rights Committee urged Greece to consider amending the 2021 legislation on joint custody to ensure the protection of all victims of domestic violence, and to specifically criminalize femicide.

LGBTI peoples' rights

In February, parliament legalized same-sex marriage although a failure to address some further gaps in the legal framework left LGBTI persons, including transgender persons and their children, at ongoing risk of discrimination.

According to the Greek Transgender Support Association, transgender people faced multiple barriers in their lives as the health system was still using a medical classification list that refers to trans status as a "gender identity disorder".

In a report published in April concerning its 2023 findings, the Network for Recording Incidents of Racist Violence documented 158 incidents, 61 of which concerned LGBTI persons.

Conscientious objectors' rights

The civilian alternative to compulsory military service remained punitive and discriminatory. Following a landmark 2021 UN Human Rights Committee ruling, which found multiple violations of the ICCPR in the case of conscientious objector Lazaros Petromelidis, Greece had yet to make full reparations to him or to enact reforms "to ensure the effective guarantee of the right to conscientious objection".

Right to a healthy environment

Experts for the Climate Change Performance Index criticized Greece's substantial expansion of gas infrastructure as increasing the country's dependency on fossil fuels.

An extreme heatwave, attributed by scientists to the effects of climate change, caused heat-related deaths. In August, a pan-European study predicted that temperature-related deaths would increase in Europe in this century, and that, "in the 3°C warming scenario, heat-related deaths in Greece would increase annually from 1,730 today to 4,767".

Large wildfires in the region of Attika in August and the municipality of Xylokastro in September burned thousands of acres of land and many homes, and resulted in three deaths. In June a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that climate change increasingly exacerbated wildfire hazards in Greece.

Right to health

Health workers and experts continued to report ongoing and significant gaps in Greece's national health system. These included staff shortages, long working hours, difficulty in taking leave, and clinics at risk of closure or operating at reduced capacity due to lack of staff and/or equipment.
