

2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece

OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

IN THIS SECTION / GREECE (TIER 2)

Greece (Tier 2)

The Government of Greece does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Greece remained on Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting and convicting more traffickers and amending the trafficking law to again include forced begging as a form of exploitation. The government amended standard operating procedures (SOPs) for asylum claims to include specialized procedures for trafficking victims and provided robust training to first responders on victim identification and referral. The government established financial incentives for businesses to hire vulnerable unemployed individuals, including trafficking victims, and created a working group to simplify procedures to grant compensation to victims. The government increased overall prevention efforts, including partnering with civil society on multiple research projects. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government identified fewer victims and did not consistently screen asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants for trafficking indicators. Numerous, sometimes violent, pushbacks against undocumented migrants and asylum seekers discouraged potential victims from identifying or cooperating with authorities, according to reports from numerous credible sources. Anti-trafficking police and social workers did not conduct any joint inspections with labor inspectors in 2021. Government-run shelters continued to limit access to some victims

for needed support, due to a lack of resources and space to provide assistance and accommodation from an increase in domestic violence victims during the pandemic. Court proceedings lasted two to six years, and the government did not provide services to mitigate this burden on victims or witnesses, thereby hindering their cooperation. Additionally, judges did not allow remote testimony and examined victims in person, even in cases where testimony could cause re-traumatization, and courts have never granted restitution or compensation to victims to date.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit officials.
- ◆ Increase proactive identification efforts for victims of forced labor and victims among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- ◆ Conduct an independent investigation into allegations of forced returns of asylum-seekers to Turkey, some of whom were likely trafficking victims.
- ◆ Strengthen rules and regulations to ensure immigration enforcement does not hinder human trafficking detection, criminal law enforcement, or victim protections and institutionalize and implement robust screening procedures for migrant flows, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied children.
- ◆ Strengthen specialized services including shelter and psycho-social support for all victims, including children, adult males, and victims in rural areas.
- ◆ Decrease the length of court proceedings for trafficking cases and encourage victims' participation in investigations and prosecutions.
- ◆ Reduce the burden of lengthy proceedings by providing alternative methods to testify, such as offering remote testimony or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings.
- ◆ Take concrete steps to expedite the victim certification process irrespective of victim cooperation in law enforcement efforts.
- ◆ Allocate sufficient resources to implement the national action plan (NAP) for combating trafficking.
- ◆ Develop policies for victim-centered prosecutions and implement witness protection provisions already incorporated into law.

- ◆ Provide training to judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement on trafficking investigations and prosecutions, particularly in rural areas and for non-specialized staff.
- ◆ Improve measures to order restitution and compensation for victims, including training prosecutors and judges, asset seizure, and legal assistance.
- ◆ Improve data collection of trafficking statistics for analysis.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. Article 323A of the criminal code criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for serious crimes, such as rape. In November 2021, the government amended Article 323A to include begging as a form of exploitation. Police investigated 20 cases with 60 suspects, compared with eight cases with 15 suspects in 2020. The government prosecuted 342 defendants, compared with 16 defendants in 2020. Courts convicted 116 traffickers, compared with 19 in 2020. Judges issued sentences ranging from one to 28 years' imprisonment, with fines ranging from €360 (\$410) to €100,000 (\$113,380). Courts also acquitted 42 individuals, compared with seven in 2020. The Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) reduced unannounced inspections on brothels, bars, and massage parlors due to lockdown measures, and the government tasked police and labor inspectors with enforcing public health measures, which limited the number of officers available to investigate trafficking cases. Courts experienced severe administrative and judicial delays due to the pandemic, with the government closing courts from November 2020 to May 2021 and partially closing courts from August 2021 to September 2021. Judges prioritized cases with expiring statutes of limitations and/ or cases with defendants about to complete the maximum duration of pre-trial detention. Additionally, social distancing measures restricted the number of people in court rooms, while positive COVID-19 cases among staff and reduced capacity due to other pandemic mitigation efforts further exacerbated delays.

The Hellenic Police maintained an ATU within the Organized Crime Division, composed of two units with 37 officers in Athens and 10 officers in Thessaloniki, who investigated trafficking and vice crimes, and 12 smaller units across municipalities that investigated trafficking and organized crime. ATU officers did not conduct joint inspections with labor inspectors and social workers from the National Social Solidarity Center (EKKA) due to limited economic activity from lockdown measures and increased responsibilities to enforce pandemic mitigation efforts (347 joint inspections in 2019). In previous years, observers reported ATU's

12 smaller units often consisted of three or four officers to handle trafficking cases among many other duties and lacked the resources and staff to conduct proactive investigations. NGOs continued to report good cooperation with law enforcement and excellent cooperation with ATU. While the government maintained trained prosecutors in Athens and Thessaloniki to handle trafficking cases, observers reported that non-specialized police, prosecutors, and judges, particularly in rural areas and islands, lacked an understanding of trafficking. In 2019, the government removed “pimping” from the criminal code, which police, prosecutors, and judges reported using to justify inspections on brothels and to prosecute traffickers when stronger evidence was unavailable; subsequently, some possible trafficking cases may not have been investigated or prosecuted at all. However, in November 2021, the government reinstated “pimping” as a crime with a minimum sentence of 18 months’ imprisonment with a fine. The government maintained institutionalized training programs on trafficking at the Police Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, Academy of Judges, the Greek Asylum Service, and the Reception Identification Service. In addition, the government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, asylum officers, and labor inspectors on various anti-trafficking issues. Prosecutors charged a police officer with 14 various offenses, including trafficking, and authorities separately arrested a navy officer for sex trafficking. In 2020, media reported authorities investigated 15 police officers affiliated with a gang that provided protection for brothels, casinos, and massage parlors. The government signed a bilateral agreement with Albania to establish a security center focusing on organized crime, including trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government identified 130 victims, compared with 167 victims in 2020. Of these, 59 were sex trafficking victims, 49 were forced labor victims, two were victims of forced criminality, and 20 victims fell into more than one category of exploitation; 80 were women, and 11 were men; 18 were girls, and 21 were boys; and 118 were foreign victims. Observers commended ATU’s ability to consistently identify victims but noted other government efforts were largely reactive and reliant on self-identification. The Hellenic National Public Health Organization and regional reception service and asylum officers screened undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied children for trafficking indicators at island Reception and Identification Centers (RIC) and respectively identified 20 and 44 possible cases involving abuse and exploitation in the country of origin or transit countries (10 in 2020). EKKA and the Asylum Service update for asylum claims to include specialized procedures if a case officer identified an asylum seeker as a trafficking victim; however, observers reported assessments in the registration

stage were too quick to identify a victim. The government expedited the registration and screening process of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers at the RICs, but in some cases, unidentified trafficking victims stayed in the same facility with their traffickers or were re-victimized due to pandemic-related restriction measures preventing movement between facilities and regions. Additionally, positive COVID-19 cases among staff and reduced capacity due to pandemic mitigation efforts occasionally exacerbated delays in identification procedures. Each RIC designated a trafficking focal point who collected information on potential trafficking cases, but many staff working at RICs were on short-term contracts, which limited their experience and training to identify victims. International organizations, NGOs, and media continued to report a serious lack of government efforts to screen undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children, at border crossings. Reports documented violent pushbacks of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers into Turkey, while civil society and media reported allegations that border police assaulted and harassed undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, including women and children, which strongly discouraged victims from self-identifying or cooperating with authorities. In previous years, observers reported a lack of identification efforts for victims of forced labor, particularly in the agriculture sector, cleaning and domestic service, and the tourism industry; however, labor inspectors reported difficulties in conducting inspections in rural areas and on islands due to the community receiving prior notice before inspections from local citizens. Civil society reported some first responders, who could not distinguish between sex trafficking and commercial sex, rejected sex trafficking victims who self-identified and, at times, sent them back to the traffickers.

The government maintained a multi-disciplinary national referral mechanism (NRM), including appropriate SOPs and referral forms. The NRM required first responders to inform and coordinate with EKKA when potential victims were identified for victim care and placement; government entities referred 37 victims (39 in 2020), and civil society organizations referred 73 victims (113 in 2020). Trafficking victims return to their home country quickly after being freed from traffickers. In addition, some potential trafficking victims are forcibly returned to Turkey before they can be screened. EKKA trained first responders, immigration officers, social service workers, hospital staff, and asylum officers on victim identification and referral procedures. The law authorized public prosecutors to officially recognize victims based on information collected by law enforcement or by a psychologist and social worker if a victim did not want to cooperate with law enforcement. In 2020, a prosecutor officially recognized a victim for the first time based solely on the recommendations of NGO experts, social workers, and psychologists; however, observers reported inconsistent use of psychologists and social workers for identification procedures, and procedures were lengthy and sometimes took

years for victims to receive. Certified victim status entitled foreign victims to a renewable one-year residence and work permit, but victims without this status still had access to immediate support and assistance. Additionally, the government did not recognize victims who were exploited abroad but identified in Greece. Of the 156 victims identified by the government, public prosecutors granted official victim status to only seven victims (four in 2020), while one victim was in the process of receiving official victim status (six in 2020) and another 40 were waiting for the process to start. Fifteen victims were EU citizens, and nine were Greek citizens who did not need a residence and work permit.

The government, in cooperation with NGOs, provided shelter, psycho-social support, medical care, legal aid, and reintegration support. While the government provided personal protective equipment and virtual assistance to victims, observers reported virtual assistance for victims was nonexistent or not effective. The government was unable to determine how much total funding was spent on victim protection and did not allocate funding to civil society, with the exception of projects co-financed by the EU and state budget funds. EKKA secured €631,840 (\$716,370) from EU security funds to support the NRM from 2018 to 2022 and maintained a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with an NGO to host a legal consultant and two anti-trafficking advisors. Two agencies provided general shelter and support services to trafficking victims: the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) operated 21 shelters and 40 counseling centers for female victims of violence, and EKKA operated two long-term shelters, an emergency shelter, and two Social Support Centers for vulnerable populations in need of assistance. GSFPGE and EKKA shelters assisted 37 victims (22 in 2020). However, EKKA and GSFPGE shelters continued to reject some victims from accessing support due to the lack of capacity, resources, and space to provide assistance and accommodation. For example, government-run shelters did not have space to accommodate some trafficking victims due to an increase in domestic violence cases during the pandemic. Experts reported the government did not transfer trafficking victims, identified at RICs, to the mainland for victim assistance due to the lack of accommodation and housing. As in previous years, victims in rural areas and islands had little access to support services and often were accommodated in police stations or hospital wards, or they received no assistance. Observers reported a lack of specialized shelters for victims with only one NGO-run shelter providing specialized assistance for female trafficking victims and an NGO-run shelter for sexually exploited men. Government-run shelters, NGO-run shelters, and facilities for unaccompanied children accommodated child victims but did not provide specialized support. Central and local governments maintained cooperation agreements with some NGOs to house, protect assist vulnerable children, including trafficking victims, and allocated buildings to use as shelters. The government added trafficking victims into a category of vulnerable unemployed

individuals and provided financial incentives to businesses to hire 800 individuals from this category, including subsidies for salaries and social welfare that was renewable for an additional year. Victims who did not apply for certified victim status could receive a residence and work permit by applying for asylum or for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. In 2021, the government processed 16 residence permits for trafficking victims, 12 residence renewal permits, and two newly-issued residence permits. The process to receive residence permits was difficult without an attorney and took time.

Due to a lack of consistent screening efforts for trafficking indicators in migrant flows, authorities likely detained and deported some unidentified trafficking victims among undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. While courts prioritized cases with child victims, court proceedings for cases with adult victims often lasted two to six years, and the government did not provide services to mitigate this burden on victims or witnesses, thereby hindering their cooperation. Prosecutors relied heavily on victim testimony without corroborating evidence, and the government did not provide funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings. Some suspected traffickers intentionally postponed court appearances to increase the chances of victims being unwilling to testify in court and/or may have paid bribes to repatriated victims to preclude them from testifying. The law entitled victims to mental health professionals during court proceedings and the use of audiovisual technology for remote testimony, but many courts lacked the capabilities to deploy these resources. Additionally, some judges did not allow remote testimony because they wanted to examine the victim and the witnesses in person, even in cases where testimony could cause re-traumatization. The law provided for witness protection and non-disclosure of the witness' personal information; however, no trafficking victims received full witness protection privileges to date, police only escorted victims during trials, and courts revealed victims' identities during proceedings. Judges have not ever issued restitution for victims in criminal proceedings. Greek law entitled victims to file civil suits against traffickers for compensation; however, no victims to date had filed for or subsequently received compensation from their traffickers in part due to their reluctance to wait for the case to obtain a decision in a lengthy court process. The government established a working group to simplify the procedure of granting compensation to trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (ONRHT) continued to coordinate government-wide anti-trafficking efforts despite lacking sufficient resources. The position of the National Rapporteur

remained vacant after the government appointed the previous rapporteur to another position in December 2021. The government continued to implement the NAP for 2019-2023, monitored anti-trafficking efforts, and made assessments publicly available; however, experts reported the government did not allocate sufficient resources to anti-trafficking efforts and implementation of the NAP. OHRHT, in partnership with a university, launched a pilot project to use technology to remotely monitor working conditions of agricultural workers to prevent forced labor. Additionally, the government, in partnership with a think tank, conducted research to assess investigations and prosecutions on trafficking cases and created a working group with legal and criminal justice professionals to identify gaps in implementation of anti-trafficking legislation. ONRHT, in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs, organized awareness campaigns targeting children, migrants, parents, the public, and seasonal workers. The government operated four hotlines, one for female victims of violence, one for individuals in vulnerable situations, one for unaccompanied children, and another for labor infringement and undeclared work complaints; hotlines received no calls related to trafficking in 2021 and 2020. ONRHT signed an MOU with UNICEF to strengthen efforts to combat child trafficking and maintained an MOU with two regional governments to strengthen cooperation on various anti-trafficking efforts, including preventing forced labor in public procurement supply chains. The Hellenic Public Procurement Authority terminated contracts when it identified child labor, forced labor, and/ or other forms of trafficking in public procurement. The government provided free airtime for public service announcements for NGOs and agencies on trafficking issues. The government certified and licensed private labor recruitment agencies and prohibited recruitment fees. Labor inspectors conducted inspections of businesses and issued fines for various labor-law violations to 4,892 businesses as a result of inspections from January 1 to September 21, 2021. As restriction measures for the pandemic were eased, inspections in the first quarter of 2022 intensified with labor inspectors conducting 6,722 checks and issuing 567 fines totaling €623,548 (\$706,970) for labor-related violations. The government allowed migrant workers with a work permit of one year or longer to change employers, but migrant workers could not change their job specialization and social security provider. The government also allowed seasonal workers to sign a new contract with a different employer or renew their contract. The government signed an agreement with the Government of Bangladesh to allow 4,000 seasonal work permits for the next five years to Bangladeshi citizens to work in the agricultural sector. It also provided temporary residence and work permits to Ukrainian nationals fleeing the war in Ukraine. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting awareness campaigns targeting potential purchasers of commercial sex.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Greece, and traffickers exploit victims from Greece abroad. Traffickers operating in Greece are primarily Greeks and other Western and Eastern Europeans, but some are also from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Traffickers subject some women and children from Eastern and Southern Europe, South and Central Asia, Cameroon, Georgia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Russia to sex trafficking in unlicensed brothels, on the street, in strip clubs, in massage salons, and in hotels. Victims of forced labor in Greece are primarily children and men from Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Syria. Traffickers exploit migrant workers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan to debt bondage and forced labor in agriculture. Traffickers force marginalized Romani children from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania to sell goods on the street, beg, or commit petty theft. Unaccompanied children, primarily from Afghanistan, engage in survival sex and are vulnerable to trafficking. Refugee and migrant women, especially those living in the island RICs, are highly vulnerable to trafficking. NGOs report rapes of migrant women in migrant and refugee camps and allege organized criminal groups in camps use tents and shipping containers as brothels. Most migrants and asylum seekers are believed to rely on smugglers at some point during their journey and in some instances are forced into exploitation upon arrival in Greece.

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