

GREECE

Hellenic Republic

Head of state: **Katerina Sakellaropoulou (replaced Prokopis Pavlopoulos in March)**

Head of government: **Kyriakos Mitsotakis**

Austerity measures adopted over the past decade continued to erode the accessibility and affordability of health care. Allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force by police persisted. More pushbacks of refugees and migrants at land and sea were reported. In a historic ruling in October, an Athens court found the extreme far-right Golden Dawn party guilty of running a criminal organization. Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos was destroyed by fires.

BACKGROUND

In October, the International Monetary Fund highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had interrupted Greece's modest economic recovery, with the GDP contracting by 7.9% in the first six months of the year.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Research published in April found that austerity measures adopted in the previous 10 years had continued to erode the accessibility and affordability of health care in Greece.¹ As a result, many people found it harder to afford health care and to access the public health system. The retrogressive impact of these measures, which disproportionately impacted the poorest and most marginalized, combined with how they were implemented, violated the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. Many of the challenges faced by health workers, including difficulties due to low numbers of staff, were exacerbated by COVID-19.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Incidents of ill-treatment and excessive and otherwise unlawful use of force by law enforcement officials continued to be

reported. Those targeted included people protesting in solidarity with refugees, those who gathered in public squares as the authorities started easing COVID-19 restrictions, and refugees and migrants.

In May, a court in the capital, Athens, awarded compensation to journalist Manolis Kypreos after it found the Greek state responsible for his serious injury by a police officer who threw a stun grenade at him in 2011. Concerns were raised following the authorities' decision to appeal against the ruling in October and the impact this would have on Manolis Kypreos' right to an effective remedy.

In October, a Mixed Jury Court in Athens started hearing the case against two civilians and four police officers indicted for the death of LGBTI activist Zak Kostopoulos in Athens in September 2018.

RIGHTS OF REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS

Land and sea arrivals declined sharply during the year, with 15,669 arrivals recorded as of 31 December, compared to 74,613 in 2019.

While the government claimed the reduced arrivals as the result of their policies, population numbers were also impacted by COVID-19 and the tougher approach to border control, in numerous instances accompanied by reports of pushbacks and violence.

In May, amendments to the asylum and migration laws further reduced procedural and substantive safeguards for individuals. The changes expanded the use of detention in asylum and return procedures and provided for the creation of new facilities, with a controlled entry/exit system intended to replace open camps.

Despite the formal implementation in April of a new system to ensure asylum-seekers' access to public health care, individuals continued to face difficulties.

Pushbacks

Following Turkey's announcement on 27 February that it would no longer prevent asylum-seekers and migrants from crossing

into the EU, tens of thousands of people tried to cross Greece's land borders in the Evros region. Greece reacted by sending in border forces that used tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets against those attempting to cross. Testimonies described a series of abuses by Greek border forces, including excessive use of force, beatings, use of live ammunition, unlawful detention and systematic pushbacks into Turkey, leading to the deaths of at least two men and the disappearance of one woman. These practices were consistently denied by Greek authorities.

Among the measures taken to address the situation at its borders, on 2 March, Greece suspended asylum applications for one month and most refugees and migrants arriving by sea were held arbitrarily.²

In the same month, the EU Commission praised Greece as Europe's "shield" and mobilized additional funds to support its migration system; additional assets were deployed by the EU Border and Coast Guard (FRONTEX).

Numerous incidents of pushbacks and dangerous practices at sea against refugees and migrants, allegedly by Greek security forces, were also reported by NGOs and other actors.

Following allegations, internal inquiries were launched into FRONTEX's involvement in pushbacks in the Aegean Sea.

Situation on the Aegean islands

Despite reduced arrivals, overcrowding levels in the five EU-sponsored hotspots on the Aegean islands reached a peak around March. At that time, Moria refugee camp on Lesbos, with capacity for 3,000 people, hosted almost 20,000. Camp residents continued to suffer unsanitary conditions, inadequate medical care, insecurity and violence, including gender-based violence.

Between 8 and 10 September, consecutive fires destroyed Moria camp, leaving its 12,000 or more residents to sleep rough for days on a road cordoned by police, without adequate access to shelter, sanitation and food. By 17 December, 553 unaccompanied

minors were relocated to European countries from Greece, including 406 who were removed from Lesbos. Other Moria residents were moved to a new temporary tent camp, where they faced conditions that were criticized by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and NGOs. The EU Commission formed a taskforce to manage the situation in Lesbos in co-operation with the Greek authorities.

COVID-19 response in asylum facilities

Responding to COVID-19, Greece restricted the movements of asylum-seekers inside and outside camps. In many facilities, these measures were repeatedly and discriminatorily renewed throughout the year. The overcrowded camps in Lesbos and Samos, among other locations, registered COVID-19 outbreaks and individuals were placed under quarantines. The inadequate living conditions prevented the implementation of quarantines with full respect of people's basic rights.

Situation on mainland

Transfers of asylum-seekers and recognized refugees to the mainland increased, reaching 13,500 as of 30 November.

From June, thousands of people who obtained international protection status were required to leave reception facilities around Greece, following a legislative amendment which reduced accommodation support. Media and NGOs documented that many faced difficulties in accessing basic services on the mainland and were sleeping rough in Athens.

Criminalization of solidarity

In April and September, new rules severely limited NGOs' ability to work on migration and asylum issues. While the criminal proceedings against rescuers Sarahardini and Séan Binder remained pending, in October, criminal charges were announced against 33 NGO members and the independent refugee shelter PIKPA was closed and its residents moved to a different facility on Lesbos.

DISCRIMINATION

In a landmark verdict in October, an Athens court found the political leadership of far-right party Golden Dawn guilty of running a criminal organization. Golden Dawn members committed a series of violent crimes, including attacks against refugees, migrants, trade unionists and human rights defenders. Forty-three party members, including 11 former Members of Parliament, were convicted for participating in a criminal organization. Golden Dawn member Giorgos Roupakias was convicted of the murder of anti-fascist singer Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, and 15 other defendants were convicted as accessories. The court convicted five people of the attempted murder of an Egyptian fisherman and four defendants for the attack against trade unionists from the Greek Communist Party.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In July, NGOs, trade unions and political parties expressed serious concerns over a controversial bill regulating public assemblies. The bill became law on 11 July and included a provision establishing liability for the organizers of an assembly.³

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

Serious violations of the rights of conscientious objectors continued, including repeated prosecutions, fines and trials in military courts. In October, a 45-year-old conscientious objector whose application for conscientious objector's status had been rejected in 2004 by the Minister of National Defence, was acquitted on procedural grounds by a military court.

Procedures for the examination of applications on conscientious objectors' status were suspended for nearly 15 months before a reformed Committee, tasked to examine such applications, started operating in July. An appeal against a 2019 increase to the length of alternative service before the Supreme Administrative Court was pending at the end of the year.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Prison inmate and university student Vasilis Dimakis went on hunger and thirst strike in April and May, protesting that his transfer to Grevena prison and then to an isolation cell in the female ward of Korydallos prison prevented him from continuing his university education. Vasilis Dimakis ended his strike at the end of May. Following pressure from civil society, he was returned to his original cell in Korydallos prison, where he was able to continue his studies.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT

In a report published on 9 April, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture highlighted systemic failures in Greece's prisons. On the same day, a female prisoner died in Eleonas prison; fellow inmates reported that she had not received adequate medical attention. Prisoners around the country told the Initiative for Detainees' Rights that they were not provided with personal protective equipment against COVID-19.

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1. [Greece: COVID-19 crisis exposes urgent need to bolster austerity-ravaged health system \(News story 27 April\)](#)
 2. [Europe: Caught in a political game: asylum-seekers and migrants on the Greece/Turkey border pay the price for Europe's failures \(EUR 01/2077/2020\)](#)
 3. [Greece: Blanket ban on public assemblies must be urgently revoked \(EUR 25/3346/2020\)](#)

GUATEMALA

Republic of Guatemala

Head of state and government: **Alejandro Giammattei Falla** (replaced Jimmy Morales Cabrera in January)

Thousands of people were detained for breaching the curfew ordered in March by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19. Health workers faced difficult working conditions during the pandemic, often lacking personal protective equipment and in some cases work contracts or wages.