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2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece

OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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GREECE: TIER 2

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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 to 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 convicting more traffickers and identifying more victims. A prosecutor officially recognized a victim for the first time based on the recommendations of NGO experts, social workers, and psychologists, and the Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) consistently identified victims with NGOs reporting excellent cooperation. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (ONRHT) coordinated with relevant ministries and regional governments to ensure trafficking victims had access to COVID-19 tests and organized a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with two regional governments to strengthen cooperation on various anti-trafficking efforts. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government lacked efforts to screen asylum-seekers and migrants for trafficking at entry points to Greece. In addition, reports from credible sources documented numerous, sometimes violent, forcible returns, or “pushbacks,” against migrants and asylum-seekers who had entered Greek territory, including women and children. The pushback discouraged potential victims from self-identifying or cooperating with authorities. The government required victims to obtain a negative COVID-19 test before staying at

government-run shelters, but victims lacked access to medical services, and COVID-19 tests were initially scarce and expensive. Government-run shelters continued to reject some victims from accessing support due to the lack of capacity, resources, and space to provide assistance and accommodation due to increased numbers of domestic violence cases during the pandemic. Court proceedings continued to last two to six years, hindering cooperation from victims and key witnesses and consequently resulting, at times, in acquittals of suspected traffickers.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase proactive identification efforts for victims of forced labor and victims among vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. • Institutionalize and implement robust screening procedures for migrant flows, including asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors. • Strengthen specialized services including shelter and psycho-social support for all victims, including children, adult males, and victims in rural areas. • Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit officials • Decrease the length of court proceedings for trafficking cases. • Encourage victims' participation in investigations and prosecutions by providing alternative methods to testify, including remote testimony or funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings. • Take concrete steps to expedite the official victim identification process irrespective of victim cooperation in law enforcement efforts. • Allocate sufficient resources to implement the national action plan 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. • Standardize data collection and produce accurate data on anti-trafficking efforts. • Improve measures to order restitution and compensation for victims, including training prosecutors and judges, asset seizure, and legal assistance.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained 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. Police investigated eight sex trafficking cases with 15 suspects, a decrease compared with 25 cases with 14

suspects in 2019. The government prosecuted 16 defendants, a decrease compared with 33 in 2019; of the 16, seven were prosecuted for sex trafficking and nine for forced labor. First instance courts convicted 19 traffickers, a slight increase from 15 in 2019; 11 for sex trafficking and eight for forced labor. Courts acquitted seven individuals (23 in 2019); five individuals suspected of sex trafficking and two individuals suspected of forced labor. Judges issued sentences ranging from one to 17 years' imprisonment, compared with four months to 27 years' imprisonment with fines from €50,800 (\$62,330) to €100,000 (\$122,700) in 2019. With courts closed due to pandemic lockdown measures for a total of seven months from March 2020 to June 2020 and November 2020 to January 2021, judges prioritized cases with expiring statutes of limitation and/or felonies with defendants about to complete the maximum duration of pre-trial detention; as a result, judges suspended decisions on 19 sex trafficking cases and 11 forced labor cases.

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). ATU limited unannounced inspections on brothels, bars, and massage parlors due to lockdown measures but continued proactive investigations on trafficking cases. 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 had been used by police, prosecutors, and judges 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. The government maintained institutionalized training programs on trafficking for police, the coast guard, judges, and the asylum service. In addition, the government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, prosecutors, judges, social workers, asylum officers, and labor inspectors on various anti-trafficking issues. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses, but media repor

authorities investigated 15 police officers affiliated with a gang that provided protection for brothels, casinos, and massage parlors. Additionally, authorities reported an ongoing investigation into the wife of a former Greek ambassador accused of conducting domestic servitude in the ambassadorial residence in Slovenia. The government assisted with three European arrest warrants, four European investigative orders, and three requests for judicial assistance. The government also shared information with Albanian and Bulgarian authorities and 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 167 victims (150 in 2019) some of whom fell into more than one category of exploitation; 75 were sex trafficking victims, 94 were forced labor victims, including 73 victims of forced begging, two victims of forced criminality, and one victim of “slavery;” 78 were women and 15 were men; 35 were girls and 39 were boys; and 140 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 migrants, asylum-seekers, and unaccompanied children for trafficking indicators at island Reception and Identification Centers (RIC) and identified 10 possible cases involving abuse and exploitation in the country of origin or transit countries (15 in 2019), of which four cases were referred to the national referral mechanism (NRM). In previous years, asylum-seekers waited more than a month for their screening due to a lack of training, staff, and resources and, as a result, a trafficking survivor was re-victimized in a migrant camp in 2019 while waiting for legal documents and RIC screening procedures. The government expedited the registration and screening process of 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 prevented movement between facilities and regions. Additionally, positive COVID-19 cases among staff and reduced capacity due to pandemic mitigation efforts 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 migrants and asylum-seekers, including unaccompanied children, at border crossings. Reports documented violent pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers into Turkey, while civil society and media reported allegations that border

police assaulted and harassed 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 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 NRM, including appropriate standard operating procedures (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 39 victims in 2020 (68 in 2019) and civil society organizations referred 113 victims (82 in 2019). The government, separately and in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs, trained law enforcement, immigration officers, social service workers, labor inspectors, 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 a psychologist and a 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, cooperation with investigations was often required to receive official victim status, and procedures were lengthy and sometimes took years for victims to receive. Official victim status entitled foreign victims to a renewable one-year residence and work permit; victims without this status only had access to immediate support and assistance. Additionally, the government did not recognize victims who were exploited abroad but identified in Greece. Of the 167 victims identified by the government, public prosecutors granted official victim status to only four victims (two in 2019), while six victims were in the process of receiving official victim status (25 in 2019). Forty-seven victims were EU citizens, and 27 were Greek citizens who did not need a residence and work permit, including 33 child victims from Bulgaria, 23 child victims from Greece, and nine from Romania.

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 vi

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 (\$755,260) from EU security funds to support the NRM from 2018 to 2022 and maintained a MOU with an NGO to host a legal consultant and two anti-trafficking advisors. Two agencies provided shelter and general 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 22 victims (12 in 2019). 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, during lockdown measures in 2020, government-run shelters did not have space to accommodate some trafficking victims due to an increase in domestic violence cases, while some shelters stopped receiving new cases all together. 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. The government also required victims to obtain a negative COVID-19 test before staying at a government-run shelter, but victims lacked access to medical services and COVID-19 tests were initially scarce and expensive; however, once ONRHT was notified of the need, it coordinated with relevant ministries and regional governments to ensure identified trafficking victims had access to COVID-19 tests. As in previous years, victims in rural areas and islands had little access to support services and often were accommodated in police stations, hospital wards, or 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 and short-term government shelters for asylum-seekers or homeless persons for male victims. 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, and assist vulnerable children, including trafficking victims, and allocated buildings to use as shelters. Victims who did not apply for official recognition could receive a residence and work permit by applying for asylum or for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. The government issued one residence permit (two in 2019) and renewed an additional one for a certified victim (13 in 2019); the government did not provide statistics on residence permits or granting of asylum to victims who lacked official recognition. The process to receive residence permits was difficult without an attorney and took tir

There were no reports the government penalized victims for crimes traffickers compelled them to commit; however, due to a lack of consistent screening efforts for trafficking indicators in migrant flows, authorities likely detained some unidentified migrants and asylum-seekers. Prosecutors relied heavily on victim testimony without corroborating evidence, and court proceedings often lasted two to six years, which hindered cooperation from victims and key witnesses. The government did not provide funding for travel and other expenses for victims to attend court hearings, and 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 never 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.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. ONRHT continued to coordinate government-wide anti-trafficking efforts despite lacking sufficient resources. The government continued to implement the national action plan (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. ONRHT, in cooperation with international organizations, created awareness campaigns targeting the general public, migrants, refugees, local authorities, public institutions, and the private sector. ONRHT signed an MOU with two regional governments to strengthen cooperation on various anti-trafficking efforts, including preventing forced labor in public procurement supply chains. The government provided free airtime for public service announcements for NGOs and agencies on trafficking issues. Foreign labor recruitment agencies could be subjected to government inspection, but the lack of competent staff to conduct such inspections resulted in limited oversight. Labor inspectors

conducted inspections of businesses and issued fines to 37 foreign nationals totaling €185,000 (\$226,990) for undeclared labor-related violations. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting awareness campaigns. The government operated three hotlines, one for female victims of violence, one for individuals in vulnerable situations, and another for labor infringement and undeclared work complaints; hotlines did not receive any calls related to trafficking in 2020.

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, China, 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, and South Asia. Migrant workers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan are susceptible to debt bondage, reportedly in agriculture. Traffickers force marginalized Romani children from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania to sell goods on the street, beg, or commit petty theft. An increase in unaccompanied children has increased the number of children susceptible to exploitation. 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, were 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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