

2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Greece

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Greece during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

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

Section 1.

Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

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

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Section 2.

Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members. Domestic and international agencies, however, reported that journalists and media outlets faced pressure to avoid criticizing the government or reporting scandals.

The constitution and law protected freedom of expression but allowed restrictions on speech inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups based on their race, skin color, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, sex “identity,” or disability.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

On October 11, an Athens first instance court rejected a lawsuit filed by former chief of staff to the prime minister Grigoris Dimitriadis against several media outlets and journalists for defamation following their reporting on a wiretapping scandal. In his lawsuit, which the International Press Institute had called “a startling example of a strategic lawsuit against public participation,” Dimitriadis alleged he had lost his job and suffered reputational harm due to their news stories concerning the scandal. The court ruled the journalists’ publications were made in the public interest and did not intend to harm Dimitriadis’ reputation.

A July EU *Rule of Law Report* found seven cases of harassment or intimidation of journalists in the country, compared with 16 during the previous year. In a joint statement, several media-freedom-related organizations asserted that the EU report was misleading, overly positive, and at odds with “the alarming reality experienced by journalists, activists, and civil society organizations on the ground.” The statement argued the EU report would embolden the government’s “crackdown on independent media and civil society.”

On May 14, reporter Rena Kouveliotti was physically attacked by an unknown individual while Kouveliotti was reporting on unauthorized building near a construction site. The Journalists’ Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers denounced the incident.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The government did not censor media. Major outlets tended not to publish unflattering news, which humanitarian groups attributed to pressure from media owners, concerns about safety or job security, or vulnerability to criminal defamation.

National television and radio media service providers had to register with the National Radio and Television Council. The government also maintained a register of accredited local websites that were required to display their certification on their homepage. A similar electronic registry was in place for regional and local press.

Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media

In March, the government adopted the EU European Media Freedom Act, aiming to safeguard media freedom, media pluralism, and editorial independence.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct labor activities without interference, and strike.

For a trade union to be formally established, the law required a minimum of 20 founding members. The law generally protected the right to bargain collectively. Trade unions meeting the statutory minimum membership could engage in collective bargaining. If no trade union was present in an enterprise, the law allowed associations of five or more workers to engage in collective bargaining. Unions stated this allowed employers to bypass unions and bargain with smaller and less powerful associations, undermining efforts to organize genuine unions. The law allowed company-level agreements to take precedence over sector-level collective agreements in the private sector, but in all cases, the law mandated a statutory minimum wage applicable for all.

Only trade unions could call strikes. Any such decision had to be made by at least one-half of the union's active registered members. The law permitted trade unions to convene meetings virtually. Under the law, a decision to strike could not be made if members of a union were not provided a virtual means to take part in the discussion and vote.

Courts could declare a strike illegal and abusive for a number of reasons, including if the risk of financial ruin for the enterprise disproportionately superseded the employees' benefits. On March 14, the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY) reported that since the beginning of the year, courts declared four public servants' strikes unlawful.

On October 22, a first instance court in Athens found a strike by the Federation of Teachers of Greece, announced for October 23, unlawful on several grounds, including the absence of the union's general assembly approval, the limited warning period, and the absence of skeleton staff. Despite the court's decision, the strike took place in the context of a wider call for strike by ADEDY.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Legislation also prohibited the recruitment of strikebreakers throughout the duration of a lawful strike and lockouts. If calling a strike, a union had to defend the right of employees who did not take part to travel freely to and from work without hindrance or threat of corporal or psychological violence. If this clause was violated, the strike could be suspended.

The law gave authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order was obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempted individuals with a documented physical or mental disability. The law prohibited the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strikes.

The government enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, but procedures to resolve labor problems were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The government set the national minimum salary above the poverty level for private-sector employees and unspecialized workers. The maximum legal workweek was 40 hours, although legislation provided for the ability of employees in certain private businesses, operating on a 24/7 basis, and for limited periods of time, to work an additional two hours per day or an additional eight-hour shift with wages increased by 40 percent.

Some sectors were required to issue digital work cards, allowing authorities to monitor staff hours and leave in real time. Employers could be fined for any violations of wage and hour laws, and the government could suspend business operations in case of repeated violations. Courts were required to promptly examine and issue rulings regarding employee complaints of delayed payment.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law provided minimum standards of occupational safety and health (OSH) applicable for all industries. It placed responsibility for identifying unsafe situations on occupational safety and health experts rather than workers. Workers had the right to file a confidential complaint with the Labor Inspectorate regarding working conditions and to remove themselves from such situations without jeopardizing their employment. Owners who repeatedly violated the law concerning safety standards could face temporary closure.

The government proactively identified unsafe conditions and responded to workers' occupational, safety, and health-related complaints. Sectors in which alleged violations of OSH standards were common included manufacturing, food service, hotels, agriculture, and construction.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government enforced minimum wage, hour, and OSH laws, mostly in the formal sectors of the economy and when complaints were filed. The Labor Inspectorate was responsible for enforcement of all labor laws, other than those pertaining to mining and marine shipping, which fell under the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy respectively.

Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections, impose fines, and initiate sanctions. The number of inspectors was not sufficient, especially in the islands and during the tourist season. The most common offenses included digital-card-related violations; undeclared labor; nonpayment of wages, salaries, and benefits; and failure to provide data to government authorities. Penalties for violations were commensurate with similar violations such as fraud or negligence and were applied regularly.

During prolonged summer heatwaves, the Ministry of Labor banned outdoor work in the afternoon under threat of fines. Archaeological sites were closed nationwide.

Trade unions maintained that enforcement of labor standards remained inadequate in shipping, tourism, construction, manufacturing, catering, agriculture, small businesses, and the informal economy, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups, including migrant workers. Overtime work was not always registered officially or paid accordingly.

The informal sector accounted for approximately 20 percent of the economy and was largely concentrated in tourism, agriculture, and service sectors. Informal workers were not protected by wage, hour, occupational safety, or health laws.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution and laws prohibited arbitrary arrest and provided for the right of any persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

On February 23, several media reported that 36 Egyptian asylum-seeking shipwreck survivors remained detained for two months in Corinth despite the ombudsperson's call for their release. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Equal Rights Beyond Borders stated that following the

ombudsperson's report, police officers conducted strip searches and searches in the detainees' rooms, which the NGO interpreted as an effort to intimidate the detainees.

The law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and required judicial warrants for arrests, except during the commission of a crime. The law required detainees be promptly informed of the charges against them at their first court appearance.

The law required police to bring detainees before a magistrate, who should issue a detention warrant or order the detainee's release within 24 hours. There was a functioning bail system as well as other options for release pending trial. Detainees were allowed prompt access to a lawyer of their choice, or one provided by the state. The law provided for a state-provided lawyer after a person was formally charged with a criminal offense rather than from the outset of custody.

These rights were generally respected. Indigent defendants facing felony charges received legal representation from the bar association. NGOs and international organizations provided limited legal aid to detained migrants and asylum seekers.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3.

Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited such practices. There were reports, however, of mistreatment and abuse by police and the Hellenic Coast Guard, including against members of racial and ethnic minority groups, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, detainees, demonstrators, and Roma.

On September 21, a Pakistan national, age 37, died in Athens police custody while being held on charges of property damage. Police stated the victim had been injured prior to his detention and was then further injured during an altercation with other detainees. The investigation remained pending at year's end.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited the worst forms of child labor. A presidential decree permitted children 15 or older to engage in hazardous work in certain circumstances, such as during vocational or professional training. In such cases,

workers had to be monitored by a safety technician or doctor. Hazardous work included that which exposed workers to toxic and cancer-producing elements, radiation, and similar conditions. The minimum age for employment, including in the industrial sector, was 15, with higher minimum ages for some activities. The minimum age did not apply to short-term light work and daytime work in family-run agriculture, forestry, or livestock. Given Labor Inspectorate approval, children older than three were allowed to work in cultural activities if their physical and mental health could be proven unaffected.

The Labor Inspectorate was responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment. The government did not always effectively enforce such laws. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for analogous crimes and were regularly applied against identified and reported violators.

Family members reportedly compelled some children to beg, pick pockets, or sell merchandise on the street.

Child Marriage

The legal age for marriage was 18, although a court could authorize persons who were 16 and 17 to marry. The government effectively enforced the law, except in the case of Romani children, especially tent dwellers living in isolated settlements. Although official statistics were unavailable, NGOs reported illegal child marriage remained common in Romani communities, with girls often marrying at age 15 or younger, and male Roma often marrying between ages 15 and 20.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status. The government provided protection to refugees through an autonomous asylum service and an appeals authority under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Tight deadlines guided each step, and missed deadlines could result in a negative asylum or refugee determination and a deportation order. There were complaints from NGOs and international organizations regarding government failures to effectively investigate allegations of forced returns of asylum seekers and to hold to account those responsible.

NGOs reported that gaps in interpretation and medical services impeded access to vulnerability assessments and delayed provision of protection and care. In June, the Association of Asylum Service and Appeals Authority Employees and the Union of Asylum Service Contract Workers released a statement complaining interpretation services were interrupted due to the government's failure to pay its interpretation contractor.

International organizations, NGOs, and media outlets continued to argue that pushbacks denied potential asylum seekers access to vulnerability assessments and to the asylum process more broadly.

Resettlement

The government accepted refugees for resettlement and offered naturalization to refugees residing on its territory. In December 2023, parliament approved an amendment providing for regularization of previously undocumented migrants, including rejected asylum seekers, who had an employment

offer and at least three years of physical presence in the country. Under the new law, unaccompanied minors who became adults were entitled to 10-year residence permits provided they completed at least three years of Greek schooling by the age of 23 and were accepted into vocational training, an apprenticeship, or university-level schools or institutions. Naturalization requirements for recognized refugees included seven years of residency. The government also processed family reunification applications of asylum seekers' relatives in other countries.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish population was approximately 5,000. Antisemitic rhetoric was a problem, particularly in certain press, blogs, and social networking sites.

On July 4, the Athens Hellenic Police counterterrorism division announced the arrests of seven suspects in connection with June arson attacks against an Israeli-owned hotel and a Jewish synagogue. In both incidents, the fire was quickly extinguished before it caused significant damage. Alleged perpetrators included Greek, Iranian, and Afghan nationals. Five were detained pending trial and two were set free under conditions.

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.