

GREECE 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority is vested in a unicameral parliament, which approves a government headed by a prime minister. In 2015 the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

Human rights issues included criminalization of libel; allegations of refoulement of asylum seekers; corruption; and violence targeting LGBTI persons and refugee women and children.

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

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

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

b. Disappearance

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

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. There were reports, however, that at times police mistreated and abused undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, demonstrators, and Roma (also see section 2.d., Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons and section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

On July 17, the Hellenic Police Directorate for Internal Affairs reported investigating 201 cases of police abusing their authority from 2009-17. In these cases 69 percent of victims were foreign nationals. One example in the report described police physically abusing a foreign national, using racist language against him, briefly detaining him without charges, and subsequently abandoning him in a deserted area without his mobile phone. In his annual report for 2017 the ombudsman, who is entrusted with the independent investigation of abuse of authority by law enforcement staff, described the behavior of law enforcement staff in 15 cases as torture.

On July 27, human rights activists reported on social media that four armed police officers surrounded two refugees of Kurdish and Afghan origin outside the Archeological Museum in the center of Athens. Police reportedly asked the refugees to lie on the ground to be searched and then severely beat both with their batons, shouted insults, kicked one in the head, and dragged both into a police car. Social media reports indicated police told the refugees, “We’re going to count to 10 and you have to disappear.” Photos on social media showed bruises on the face, head, chest, back, and shoulders of both refugees.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions, including holding cells, did not consistently meet national or international standards. Problems included severe overcrowding; insufficient security; lack of access to health care, especially mental, maternal, and reproductive healthcare; inadequate access to food and sanitation; inadequate supplies of resources such as blankets, clothing, and hygiene products; and lack of recreational activities. There were allegations of police mistreatment and physical and verbal abuse of migrants and refugees, including minors, at police stations and detention facilities throughout the year (also see section 2.d., Abuse of Migrant, Refugees, and Stateless Persons).

Physical Conditions: According to government statistics published in June, prisons were slightly over capacity: nationwide, prisons can accommodate 9,935 individuals and in June they housed 10,198 inmates. In an annual report for 2017 published on March 26, the ombudsman noted that prisons did not have enough medical doctors, nurses, sociologists, and psychologists to provide 24-hour care. On February 7, media reported an investigation initiated by judicial authorities into the death of an inmate in a Larissa prison cell. The 26-year-old had reportedly died on February 2 due to a tooth infection that turned fatal. According to NGO

“Solidarity Network for Prisoners,” the man did not receive proper and timely treatment.

Police detained undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in reception and identification centers (RICs) until they were registered, and these individuals continued to live in these RICs, but with freedom of movement on the island pending transfer to the mainland. Overcrowding continued to be a problem in detention and registration centers. According to some government and nongovernmental agencies--including parliamentarians, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Doctors without Borders, and Human Rights Watch (HRW)--overcrowding resulted in substandard and often precarious detention conditions, especially for vulnerable groups such as women and unaccompanied minors. The Council of Europe commissioner for human rights noted in a report issued November 6 that “serious overcrowding combined with poor hygiene conditions, insecurity and despair put the human rights of the ... residents at high risk” in Moria RIC on Lesbos island. The commissioner also “observed with great concern that living conditions in reception camps present significant risks to people’s health, which are exacerbated by very difficult access to primary healthcare services.” On June 7, HRW issued a statement denouncing the authorities’ routine confinement of asylum-seeking women with nonrelated men in the Evros region, putting them at risk of sexual violence and harassment.

On September 29, a Syrian man was killed in the mainland camp of Malakasa by other residents of the camp during a fight.

Authorities assigned some underage asylum seekers to “protective custody” in the same quarters as adults or in overcrowded and under-resourced police stations with limited access to outdoor areas. Throughout the year, NGOs such as HRW reiterated findings from previous reports that unaccompanied minors under protective custody often lived in unsanitary conditions and faced problematic access to medical treatment, psychological counseling, or legal aid.

Police also detained rejected asylum applicants due to return to Turkey, some migrants waiting to return home under the International Organization for Migration’s Assisted Voluntary Return program, and migrants suspected of committing a crime in preremoval centers, which suffered from the same issues of overcrowding, limited access to outdoor areas, unsanitary conditions, and limited access to medical treatment, psychological counseling, and legal aid.

Administration: Independent authorities investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions. The Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights published bimonthly detention-related statistics on the occupancy rate and the design capacity per prison.

Independent Monitoring: The government generally permitted independent authorities and nongovernmental observers to monitor prison and detention center conditions. The government controlled access to RICs and official migrant and asylum seeker camps for NGOs, diplomatic missions, and foreign and domestic journalists, requiring them to submit formal access requests with advance notice for each specific site. Authorities rarely denied or postponed access. From April 10 to 19, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited detention facilities across the country. Its report noted wide disparities in conditions across the country's detention centers and raised particular concerns about conditions in RICs, preremoval centers, and holding cells in local police stations.

Improvements: The government made several administrative and legislative improvements to conditions in prisons, including access to education for convicts. On March 2, parliament passed legislation establishing K-12 education and vocational training centers in all prison facilities. On March 5, the Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights Secretariat General for Anticrime Policy instituted a telemedicine program in four prisons, in cooperation with three major hospitals in Athens and the Ministry of Health.

As of April 26, 40 inmates at 11 detention facilities around the country had been enrolled in distance learning programs on donated computers in cooperation with Hellenic Open University (HOU).

The government passed legislation on April 5 providing for the subsidization of 50 percent of tuition fees for a maximum of 20 prison employees per year to attend university distance courses on public administration, anticrime, and penitentiary policies via the HOU.

The Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights launched a new round of training seminars for 700 prison staff in seven cities on mental health issues, crisis management, and treatment and reintegration of inmates.

On July 4, media reported a ministerial decision by the secretary general for penitentiary policy to require that protective isolation cells for inmates with mental

disorders have natural lighting, a bed and toilet, and camera monitoring. At year's end, the government was in the process of making the necessary changes to the isolation cells. In cooperation with the Hellenic Psychiatrist Society and the Special Monitoring Committee for the Protection of the Rights of People with Mental Disorders, the government also announced training for prison staff on how to treat inmates with self-destructive behavior.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of arrest or detention in court, and the government generally observed these requirements.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Police are responsible for law enforcement, border security, and the maintenance of order and are under the authority of the minister for citizen protection. The Coast Guard is responsible for law and border enforcement in territorial waters and reports to the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Island Policy. Police and the armed forces, the latter of which are under the authority of the Ministry of Defense, jointly share law enforcement duties in certain border areas. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police, Coast Guard, and armed forces, and the government had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse.

NGOs reported incidents of security forces committing racially and hate-motivated violence. In a March 28 report, the most recent available, the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), a group of NGOs coordinated by UNHCR and the National Commission for Human Rights, reported that law enforcement officials committed 10 of the 102 incidents of racist violence recorded in 2017. Victims in these incidents included, among others, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, a refugee, a UNHCR employee, and a male member of the Roma community. Police statistics were higher, reporting 184 potentially racially motivated incidents in 2017, 24 of which involved law enforcement officials as perpetrators. No further data on internal investigation results or penalties for offenders were available.

In a 2017 report, the ombudsman reported 117 allegations of law enforcement officials abusing their authority in nine different detention facilities. Charges

included, inter alia, 15 cases of alleged torture, 15 cases of gun use, and 53 incidents related to the endangerment of human life and bodily integrity.

NGOs, universities, international organizations, and service academies provided police training on safeguarding human rights and combatting hate crimes and human trafficking.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and requires judicial warrants for arrests, except during the commission of a crime. The law requires police to bring detainees before a magistrate, who then must issue a detention warrant or order the detainee's release within 24 hours of detention. Detainees are promptly informed of charges against them. Pretrial detention may last up to 18 months, depending on the severity of the crime, or 30 months in exceptional circumstances. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial. Expedited procedures may be applied to individuals accused of misdemeanors. Individuals are entitled to state compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained. There were no reports that police violated these laws.

Detainees may contact a close relative or third party, consult with a lawyer of their choice, and obtain medical services. Since police are required to bring detainees before an examining magistrate within 24 hours of detention, the short time period may limit detainees' ability to present an adequate defense in some instances. Defendants may request a delay to prepare a defense. Bail and restriction orders are available for defendants unless a judicial officer deems the defendant a flight risk.

Rights activists and media reported instances in which foreign detainees had limited access to court-provided interpretation or were unaware of their right to legal assistance. 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.

Arbitrary Arrest: The government placed some unaccompanied minors into "protective custody" in local police stations (see section 1, Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions).

Pretrial Detention: Prolonged pretrial detention resulting from courts being overburdened and understaffed remained a problem. The court authorized pretrial

detention under certain conditions, including when there was a flight risk or when the court was concerned that the suspect could commit additional crimes. Pretrial detention was only used for felony charges and negligent homicide cases. In the case of acquittal through a final court decision, the affected individual may seek compensation for time spent in pretrial detention. Some legal experts criticized what they considered excessive use of this measure. In addition, compensation procedures were time-consuming and the amounts offered were relatively low (9-10 euros (\$10.35-\$11.50) per day of imprisonment). Based on Ministry of Justice, Transparency, and Human Rights statistics, approximately 30 percent of those with pending cases were in pretrial detention in January 2017.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Observers reported the judiciary was at times inefficient and sometimes subject to influence and corruption. Authorities respected court orders.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The law grants defendants a presumption of innocence, and defendants have the right to be informed promptly and thoroughly of all charges. Delays were mostly due to backlogs of pending trials and understaffing. Trials are public in most instances. Defendants have the right to communicate and consult with an attorney of their choice in a timely manner and they are not compelled to testify or confess guilt. Lawyers, whether chosen by the defendant or appointed by the state, are given adequate time and space inside prison facilities to consult with their clients and prepare a defense. The government provides attorneys to indigent defendants facing felony charges. Defendants may be present at trial, present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, and question prosecution witnesses. Defendants have the right of appeal. Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to free interpretation through a court-appointed interpreter, although some NGOs criticized the quality and lack of availability of interpretation.

A new law enacted October 11 limits the use of sharia (Islamic law) to only family and civil cases in which all parties actively consent to its use.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The judiciary was generally independent and impartial in civil matters. The law provides citizens with the ability to sue the government for compensation for alleged violations of rights. Individuals and organizations may appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies including the European Court of Human Rights.

Property Restitution

The law addresses property restitution, and NGOs and advocacy groups reported the government made progress on resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens. Many Holocaust-era property claims have been resolved, but several issues remained open. The Jewish community of Thessaloniki had a pending case against the Russian government for its retention of the community's prewar archives. Additionally, the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw held a number of religious artifacts allegedly stolen from the Jewish community of Thessaloniki in 1941; the community requested the return of these items. The Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece (OPAIE) also claimed more than 100 properties owned by Jews before the war, but now occupied by government facilities. The Supreme Court issued a ruling in favor of OPAIE for one of the properties, and the Jewish community has proposed the formation of a committee to discuss the disposition of the other properties.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for the press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press,

an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the press.

Freedom of Expression: The constitution and law protect freedom of expression but specifically allow restrictions on speech inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups based on their race, color, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, or who express ideas insulting to persons or groups on those grounds. On March 11, local media reported a court sentenced a blogger in Veroia, northern Greece, to 18 months in prison and a fine of 5,500 euros (\$6,325) for inciting hatred toward Syrian refugees residing in a local reception camp. In 2016 the blogger had falsely claimed, “Illegal migrants buried a small church inside the camp so as not to be insulted [by seeing it].”

Press and Media Freedom: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists were subjected to physical attack, harassment, or intimidation due to their reporting in at least seven instances. Several attacks were led by members of far-right groups. In some instances, police arrested the perpetrators.

On June 19, a group of ultrarightists attacked a photojournalist in Athens, according to the Journalists’ Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers (ESHEA). Unidentified perpetrators also stole his camera equipment. ESHEA claimed police present at the scene did not attempt to prevent the attack or to arrest the attackers.

On June 1, a Chios court sentenced a local Golden Dawn party member to six months in prison and a 2,000 euros (\$2,300) fine for attacking a journalist in September 2017. The attack took place while the journalist was covering a protest rally against refugees and migrants on the island. In a separate case, a court sentenced the same perpetrator to 18 months in prison for instigating racially motivated violence against refugees.

A bomb caused extensive damage to private television station SKAI in Athens early December 17, but no injuries. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras immediately condemned the bombing, calling it “an attack by cowardly and dark forces against democracy itself;” however, SKAI Media Group President Yannis Alafouzou blamed the government coalition for inspiring the attack through threats and

boycotts. Police launched an investigation, but had not made any arrests as of December 18.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government did not censor media. The government maintains an online register of local websites' legal status, number of employees, detailed shareholder information, and the tax office they fall under. Once registered, these websites are accredited to accept funding through state advertising, to cover official events, and to benefit from research and training programs of the National Center of Audiovisual Works. All registered websites had to display their certification on their homepage. Although registering was an open and nonobligatory process, outlets failing to do so could be excluded from the accreditation benefits.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law provides criminal penalties for defamation. On February 26, police arrested and briefly detained journalist and publisher Kostas Vaxevanis following a lawsuit filed by former prime minister Antonis Samaras, who accused Vaxevanis of defamation. A week earlier the journalist had accused Samaras on social media of lying about his alleged involvement in a scandal concerning Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis's alleged bribes to medical doctors and politicians.

On September 22, police detained three journalists after Minister of Defense Panos Kammenos accused them of defamation. The journalists had published an article accusing Kammenos of large-scale mismanagement of European Union migration funds. The following morning the public prosecutor ordered a preliminary investigation into the incident and the immediate release of the three journalists. No further information on the case was available as of November 30.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private citizens' online communications without appropriate legal authority.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events. In February, two Orthodox Metropolitans filed separate lawsuits requesting the theatrical performance of "Jesus Christ Superstar" be banned for blasphemy. The theater company continued to stage performances despite daily and at times violent

demonstrations outside the theater by individuals opposed to the production. Actors and staff criticized authorities for failing to adequately protect their lives and property, reporting that protestors threatened “to burn down the theater,” assaulted actors and audience members, and threw paint on staff cars and the theater, but no arrests were made.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Association

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations of nationals who self-identified as ethnic Macedonian or associations that included the term “Turkish” as indicative of a collective ethnic identity (see section 6). Such associations, despite the lack of legal recognition, continued to operate.

On July 12, the Thrace appeals court rejected a request from the unofficial “Turkish Union of Xanthi” to reinstate its legal status. The association submitted this petition following a European Court of Human Rights ruling that the Greek court’s decision violated the right of association as protected by the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and a 2017 law allowing the reexamination of such previously rejected requests.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government cooperated with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: According to a wide range of credible sources, including international organizations and NGOs, authorities did not always provide adequate security or physical protection to migrants and asylum seekers, particularly those residing in RICs. The RVRN recorded 34 incidents involving racially motivated verbal and physical violence against refugees and migrants in 2017. (See also section 6, “National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities.”)

Separation and protection of vulnerable groups was not implemented at some sites. Credible reports described several incidents of violence involving asylum seekers, including fistfights, stabbings, and gender-based violence. The International Rescue Committee assessed that more than 70 individuals were sexually abused at the RIC in Moria from March to October. Several incidents of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, were also recorded in organized facilities on the mainland. Doctors without Borders reported that two victims of sexual abuse in the Moria RIC were under five years of age.

Media reported on April 28 that police arrested a refugee residing at a reception facility in Serres, northern Greece, after his 15-year-old daughter accused him of repeated rape.

On November 9, authorities arrested a male refugee in Agia Eleni camp in northern Greece on charges of sexually abusing a three-year-old boy inside the camp.

Refugee and migrant women who were victims of gender-based violence were legally eligible for temporary shelter in government-run homes and for legal and psychosocial assistance but few of them reported the abuse. Some NGO representatives said that even after victims reported rapes to the authorities, some victims continued residing in the same camp with the perpetrators.

NGOs noted inadequate psychological care for refugees and asylum seekers, especially in the six RICs. Doctors without Borders reported that 25 percent of the children they worked with in Moria RIC on Lesbos island from February to June had either self-harmed, attempted suicide, or had thought about committing suicide.

Protection of Refugees

During the year the flow of migrants and asylum seekers to the country from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East continued. As of October 31, UNHCR figures indicated 67,100 migrants and asylum seekers resided throughout the country.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries in which their lives or freedom would be threatened due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. In February the NGO Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) published a compilation of testimonies of migrants and refugees who claimed they had been forcibly returned to Turkey despite their desire to claim asylum. On February 25, a GCR lawyer and coordinator of the GCR legal team who had previously served as secretary general for migration argued in an opinion article in a local newspaper that allegations of refoulement were not being properly investigated despite appeals by UNHCR, the Council of Europe human rights commissioner, and other organizations. On May 3, GCR accused the government “of a systematic tactic of irregular forced returns in the Evros region, in violation of international law.” Government officials denied any authorized unlawful returns.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing legal protection to refugees through an autonomous asylum service under the authority of the Ministry of Migration Policy. The law requires that applicants have access to certified interpreters and allows applicants to appeal negative decisions and remain in the country while their appeals are examined.

Authorities worked with NGOs, international organizations, and the European Asylum Support Office to inform undocumented migrants awaiting registration in the asylum system, as well as non-EU foreign national detainees, about their rights and asylum procedures and IOM-assisted voluntary return programs. UNHCR also assisted the government with briefings and distribution of multilingual leaflets and information packages on asylum and asylum procedures.

On July 18, media reported the case of a Guinean national who was deported prior to having the chance to appeal the initial denial of asylum. His attorneys claimed that even though they communicated the applicant’s intent to file an appeal, authorities deported the applicant without prior notification. The government did not issue a public response.

Human rights activists and NGOs working with asylum applicants reported long waits for asylum appeals decisions due to time-consuming processes, gaps in the payment of certified interpreters, backlogs in the appeals process, and a limited number of appeals committees. On May 22, parliament passed new legislation to

accelerate the examination of asylum requests by reducing gaps in interpreter payments and introducing additional and more flexible means of communication between applicants and authorities. Despite changes in the law, structural problems in the asylum process continued to exist.

Asylum applicants from countries other than Syria complained that their asylum applications were delayed while Syrian applications were prioritized. Many asylum seekers also complained about difficulty scheduling an appointment and connecting with the Asylum Service system via Skype. NGOs, international organizations, and human rights activists reiterated concerns related to the asylum system, including the lack of adequate staff and facilities; difficulties in registering claims; questions about the expedited nature and thoroughness of the examination of initial claims and appeals; insufficient welfare, integration, counseling, legal, and interpretation services; discrimination; and detention under often inadequate and overcrowded conditions inside the RICs.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country adheres to the Dublin III Regulation, according to which authorities may return asylum seekers to the EU member state of first entry for adjudication of asylum claims.

According to a 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey, every undocumented migrant crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands would be confined to an RIC for up to 25 days, during which time the individual would have the opportunity to apply for asylum in Greece. Individuals opting not to apply for asylum or whose applications were deemed unfounded or inadmissible would be returned to Turkey under the terms of the agreement.

Freedom of Movement: Undocumented migrants arriving at Greek islands were subjected to special border reception and registration procedures, and were not allowed to leave accommodation centers for up to 25 days. After this period undocumented migrants remaining in those facilities were generally allowed to enter and exit but were prohibited from travelling to the mainland unless they filed asylum applications deemed admissible by the asylum authorities or were deemed “vulnerable.” Once asylum applications were filed, found admissible, and in process, migrants could move to an accommodation center on the mainland, space permitting. There was no restriction on movement in or out of the mainland accommodation centers.

On April 24, 21 local and international NGOs issued a statement condemning the government's practice of confining migrants and asylum seekers to certain "hotspot" islands for initial processing.

Unaccompanied minors were placed under "protective custody" due to lack of space in specialized shelters. (See section 1, Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions.)

Employment: Recognized refugees and holders of asylum-seeker papers were entitled to work, although this right was not widely publicized or consistently enforced. In March the managing board of the Greek Manpower Organization (OAED) extended the right to register for the official unemployment to migrants and refugees residing in shelters or with no permanent address, allowing them to benefit from training programs and state allowances.

Access to Basic Services: Legally, services such as shelter, health care, education, and judicial procedures were granted to asylum seekers in possession of a valid residency permit; however, staffing gaps, lack of interpreters, and overcrowded migrant sites limited certain asylum seekers' access to these services. Legal assistance was limited and was usually offered via NGOs, international organizations, and volunteer lawyers and bar associations.

RICs on islands and in the Evros region continued to be overcrowded with inadequate shelter, healthcare, wash facilities, and sewer connections, creating security and health concerns. Housing conditions at reception facilities elsewhere on the mainland were generally better. The general rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons visited Athens, Kavala, Drama, and Lesbos from July 10-12. The rapporteur found that in contrast to the acceptable accommodation centers in Kavala and Drama, Lesbos RIC conditions "continued to be appalling," with persons suffering from "severely overcrowded accommodation facilities."

Unaccompanied minors living in "protective custody" in police stations had limited or no access to health care or medical services. (See section 1, Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions.)

Many vulnerable asylum-seeking individuals were eligible to be sheltered in apartments via a housing framework implemented by UNHCR in cooperation with

some NGOs and local municipalities. Conditions in the apartments were significantly better than in reception facilities.

Administrative and facility management staff in reception centers were usually permanent state employees, eight-month government-contracted personnel, and NGO and international organization-contracted staff. Media reported cases, especially in the islands, in which assigned staff was inadequate or improperly trained.

Everyone in the country is entitled to emergency medical care regardless of legal status. Medical volunteers, NGO-contracted doctors, the Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KEELPNO), and army medical doctors provided basic health care in reception centers, referring emergencies and complex cases to local hospitals, which were often overburdened and understaffed. Some individuals suffering from chronic diseases continued to face problems with obtaining proper medication. According to a July 27 HRW report, pregnant women in Evros reception and detention facilities had no access to proper medical and prenatal care.

Domestic and international NGOs continued to criticize authorities for failing to identify asylum seekers with nonvisible vulnerabilities, such as victims of torture. In a 2018 annual review, HRW noted that authorities' failure to properly identify vulnerable asylum seekers for transfer to the mainland had "impeded their access to proper care and services." HRW argued that official policies, living conditions, and the uncertainty of the slow asylum claim decision-making process contributed to deteriorating mental health for some asylum seekers and other migrants on the islands.

Durable Solutions: Recognized refugees may apply for naturalization after three years of residence in the country under this status. The government continued to process family reunification applications for asylum seekers with relatives in other countries. IOM offered voluntary returns to rejected asylum seekers and those who renounced their asylum claims.

Temporary Protection: As of June 30, the government provided temporary protection to approximately 1,102 individuals who may not qualify as refugees.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2015 the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. As a result of the elections, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras formed a governing coalition consisting of the SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) and ANEL (Independent Greeks) parties.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. On July 19, parliament passed legislation raising the minimum required percentage of male and female candidates in local and regional elections from each party to 40 percent from 30 percent.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not always implement the law effectively. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Although observers expressed concern over perceived high levels of official corruption, the Directorate for Internal Affairs of the Hellenic Police reported an 8.5 percent reduction in the number of corruption-related complaints filed in 2017 compared to 2016. Permanent and ad hoc government entities charged with combating corruption were understaffed and underfinanced.

Corruption: Reports of official corruption continued. On May 3, an appeals court sentenced and fined 17 defendants, including former officials of the Ministry of Defense, for receiving kickbacks for purchasing an electronic simulation system for the army. The court sentenced them to 10-16 years in prison and levied a total fine of 48.5 million euros (\$55.8 million).

On May 11, an appeals court upheld the conviction of a former minister of transport for accepting a bribe from a foreign company, but allowed him to pay a fine instead of serving jail time.

The European Union (EU) announced October 4 that the European Antifraud Agency (OLAF) was investigating allegations that the Greek Defense Ministry

mismanaged 52 million euros (\$59.8 million) in EU funding for catering at refugee sites. On October 8, Greek Supreme Court Prosecutor Xeni Dimitriou ordered a domestic inquiry into allegations that the government mismanaged EU migration funding.

On October 24, media reported on a unanimous decision by the prosecutor and investigative magistrate to hold former defense minister Yannis Papantoniou and his wife in pretrial detention for allegedly accepting more than 2.8 million Swiss francs in kickbacks for defense procurements in 2003.

The government intensified efforts to combat tax evasion by increasing inspections and crosschecks among various authorities; however, media reported allegations of tax officials complicit in individual and corporate tax evasion.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires income and asset disclosure by appointed and elected officials, including private sector employees, such as journalists and heads of government-funded NGOs. Several agencies are mandated to monitor and verify disclosures, including the General Inspectorate for Public Administration, the police internal affairs bureau, the Piraeus appeals prosecutor, and an independent permanent parliamentary committee. Declarations were made publicly available, albeit with delays. The law provides for administrative and criminal sanctions for noncompliance. Penalties range from two to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of from 10,000 to one million euros (\$11,500 to \$1.15 million).

The Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) reported "mixed praise with criticism regarding Greek efforts to fight corruption in both the legislative and judicial branches of government." GRECO commended the government for increasing transparency by broadening the scope for income, assets, and interest declaration by members of parliament. GRECO noted that the government did not comply with a recommendation for greater transparency in political party financing.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases, with the exception of restricted access to reception and detention facilities for migrants on the islands and--in certain circumstances--to

official camps on the mainland. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman, a state body considered independent and effective, investigated complaints of human rights abuses by individuals. Five deputy ombudsmen dealt with human rights, children's rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality of life problems, respectively. The office received adequate resources to perform its functions. In its 2017 annual report, the office reported the number of complaints received increased by 30 percent to 15,348 total complaints. The office reported 76 percent of these complaints were satisfactorily resolved.

The autonomous, state-funded National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) advised the government on protection of human rights. The NCHR was considered independent, effective, and adequately resourced.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime punishable by penalties ranging from five to 20 years' imprisonment. The law applies equally to all survivors, regardless of their sex. Domestic violence is a crime with penalties from two to 10 years' imprisonment. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively. In November 2017 the president of the Hellenic Society of Forensic Medicine told media that only 200 of an estimated average of 4,500 rape incidents per year were officially reported. Police reported they had identified the perpetrators in 73 percent of cases of rape and attempted rape recorded in 2017, the most recent year with complete records available.

The government and NGOs made medical, psychological, social, and legal support available to rape survivors.

On April 4, the government passed legislation ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Under the same law, the government abolished the provision of the Penal Code that had allowed men convicted of statutory rape of a minor under 15 to avoid prosecution by marrying the victim.

The Hellenic Coast Guard found the body of 21-year-old college student Eleni Topaloudi in the sea near the island of Rhodes on November 28. Coast Guard officials told media that evidence suggested Topaloudi was physically and sexually assaulted before she died from drowning. Police arrested two men on December 4 on charges of gang raping and murdering Topaloudi. The men remained in pretrial detention at year's end.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): On April 4, new legislation added provisions to the Penal Code stipulating punishment for individuals who coerce or force female individuals to undergo genital mutilation. Perpetrators of female genital mutilation face mandatory prison sentences under the new law.

Although there were allegations of migrant and refugee women residing in the country undergoing female genital mutilation prior to their arrival in Greece, there was no concrete evidence that female genital mutilation was practiced in the country.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides penalties ranging from two months to five years in prison. In its 2017 report on gender and equality, the ombudsman reiterated previous findings about the difficulty in substantiating sexual harassment claims due to lack of evidence, victims' fear of repercussions of reporting cases, and the reluctance of witnesses to take sides. The report notes that many incidents of sexual harassment are not reported to the ombudsman. In his reports from previous years, the ombudsman had also noted the absence of a policy against sexual harassment in most private and public workplaces, emphasizing that employers were often ignorant of their legal obligations when employees filed sexual harassment complaints.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equality between women and men. The government effectively enforced the laws promoting gender equality, which provided for women to enjoy the same legal status and rights as men, with some exceptions when Muslim minority members in Thrace request the use of sharia by notarized consent of both parties. (See also National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities.)

According to a survey released on March 8 by a private company, the percentage of women holding executive positions in the country increased to 26 percent in 2017 from 20 percent in 2016. The government failed to provide data on the

gender pay gap, as reported by Eurostat on March 8. Based on 2014 data, the last year that the government provided relevant statistics, local women were paid an average of 12.5 percent less than men.

On May 2, Eurostat reported that 17 percent of men and 26 percent of women were unemployed in January.

On March 8, the minister for labor, social insurance, and social solidarity announced the government would no longer reveal the gender of unemployed individuals they recommend for job vacancies to avoid gender bias in hiring decisions. The government also decided to allow female victims of domestic violence residing in special shelters or lacking permanent residence to register for unemployment benefits, including training programs and state allowances.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from one's parents at birth; a single parent may confer citizenship on a child. Parents are obliged to register their children within 10 days of birth. The law allows belated birth registration but imposes a fine.

Child Abuse: Violence against children, particularly migrant, refugee, street, and Romani children, remained a problem. On July 11, the NGO "Smile of the Child" reported having received 497 reports of serious cases of abuse related to 854 children through its helpline "SOS 1056" from January 1 to June 30. Of these children, 40 percent were less than six years of age. The law prohibits corporal punishment and mistreatment of children, but government enforcement was generally ineffective. Welfare laws provide for treatment and prevention programs for abused and neglected children in addition to foster care or accommodation in shelters. Government-run institutions were understaffed, however, and NGOs reported insufficient space, including for unaccompanied minors who by law are entitled to special protection and should be housed in special shelters.

On May 15, the government passed new legislation allowing foster care and adoption procedures to be completed in under a year, making these a viable option for children in urgent need of protection.

On July 13, local NGO ELIZA launched a program to train 450 police staff members on child abuse and proper registration of child abuse-related complaints.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage is 18, although minors ages 16 and 17 may marry with authorization from a prosecutor. While official statistics were unavailable, NGOs reported that illegal child marriage was common in Romani communities, with Romani girls often marrying between the ages of 15 and 17, or even younger, and Romani boys marrying between the ages of 15 and 20. Based on 2000-16 data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, 9,407 minors were married during that period, 86 percent of whom were girls averaging 16 years of age.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age of consent is 15. The law criminalizes sex with children under the age of 15. The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and imposes penalties if the crime was committed using technology in the country. Authorities generally enforced the law.

Displaced Children: According to EKKA data from November 1, there were approximately 3,558 refugee and migrant unaccompanied children residing in the country. Local and international NGOs attested that unaccompanied minors were not always properly registered, at times lacked safe accommodations or legal guardians, and were vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation, including survival sex. EKKA statistics indicated that 451 unaccompanied minors were homeless and 275 could not be located.

On July 17, parliament passed new legislation requiring an individual “legal guardian” for each unaccompanied minor. The legislation allowed older unaccompanied minors to reside in units of semi-autonomous living, established a special body entrusted with the protection of minors and the monitoring of guardianship in each prosecution office, created a special directorate for the protection of unaccompanied minors in the national government, established a registry of certified guardians who meet certain criteria, established a registry of unaccompanied minors, and created a registry of shelters/facilities for unaccompanied minors.

Institutionalized Children: Local and international organizations condemned the use of protective custody for unaccompanied minors for prolonged periods, often in unsanitary, overcrowded conditions, resulting from a lack of available spaces in specialized shelters (see section 1, Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions).

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish community included approximately 5,000 individuals. Anti-Semitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs. Vandalism of Holocaust monuments and memorials around the country, particularly in the city of Thessaloniki, took place throughout the year. The Central Board of Jewish Communities (KIS) continued to express concern about anti-Semitic comments by some journalists in mainstream media and by some religious leaders, including Greek Orthodox Church clerics. KIS reiterated concern about political cartoons and images in mainstream media mocking political controversies through the use of Jewish sacred symbols and comparisons to the Holocaust or through equating Jews and Nazis.

Thousands of protesters participated in a massive rally in Thessaloniki on January 21 against the country's negotiations with Macedonia on the name issue. Mayor of Thessaloniki Yannis Boutaris was absent from this rally, which led to insults and posters subsequently put up around the city calling Boutaris a "closet Jew!"

On January 22, NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) filed a judicial complaint against local governments, Orthodox priests, and media for propagating the custom of the "burning of Judas" during Orthodox Easter celebrations. GHM listed 69 different cities, parishes, and media outlets that organized and advertised this custom, which was repeatedly criticized by KIS for perpetuating anti-Semitism and officially denounced by the Orthodox Church. No outcome of this complaint was publicized by year's end.

On March 10, police arrested four of the seven alleged members of the extreme-right group "Combat 18 Hellas." The criminal group was accused of involvement in explosions, arson attacks, and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and monuments. A trial had not begun by year's end.

On April 27, a Thessaloniki misdemeanor court sentenced unofficial mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete to eight months in prison for making racist and anti-Semitic

comments. In a 2014 speech, Mete stated that, “Our brothers suffer in Gaza, because of Israel. Curse on Israel. They were turned into soap by the Germans, and Hitler was right when he said that you might get mad at me now [for annihilating the Jews] but one day I will be vindicated for [what I did to] the Jews.” On May 6, despite his recent conviction, Mete gave a public address in which he accused Jews of being “murderers of infants,” and told followers that religion requires Muslims who see “an evil action [to] change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then hate him with his heart.”

On May 4, unknown vandals destroyed nine marble stones in the Jewish section of a historic Athens cemetery. President of the Athens Jewish Community Minos Moissis called the destruction “the most severe incident [of anti-Semitism] in Athens in the past 15 years.” The mayor of Athens, the secretary generals for religious affairs and human rights, and all mainstream political parties condemned the vandalism and participated in a ceremony of solidarity with the Jewish community in the cemetery. Moissis told the press that police immediately gathered evidence and filed charges.

In a June 8 interview, Mayor of Argos-Mycenae Dimitris Kamposos criticized Boutaris for his position on certain domestic issues. Mayor Kamposos said that Boutaris gets away with supporting LGBT rights because “he is liked by the Jews,” and added “we, on the other hand, cannot say what we want because we have never worn the kippah.” Kamposos was expelled from the New Democracy party and the party spokesman said it would “not tolerate any bigoted and dividing speech by any party officials.”

On July 11, unknown perpetrators desecrated and threw paint on a monument marking the site of the former Jewish cemetery inside the Aristotle University campus in Thessaloniki. The university, government officials, and opposition party members denounced the act. There were at least five other similar examples of vandalism targeting Jewish monuments.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, information, communications, buildings, transportation, the judicial system, and other state services such as special education. NGOs and organizations for disability rights reported that government enforcement of these provisions was inconsistent. There were no reported instances of police or other government officials inciting, perpetuating, or condoning violence against persons with disabilities. Most children with disabilities had the option of attending mainstream or specialized schools, unless their disability was so significant they could not function in a mainstream classroom.

According to the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), the dropout rate for students with disabilities was 30 percent. Only about 59 percent of disabled students were able to finish middle school.

Persons with disabilities, including children, continued to have poor access to public buildings, transportation, and public areas, which the law mandates they should have, particularly to buildings, ramps for sidewalks, and public transportation vehicles. While the law allows service animals to accompany blind individuals in all mass transit and eating establishments, blind activists maintained that they occasionally faced difficulties accessing public transportation, places, and services. On May 9, the president of the Association of Paraplegic Individuals stated to media that national railway employees prohibited him from traveling by train in his electric wheelchair and he was only able to travel after referring his concerns to the deputy minister of transport. On March 1, the legal representative of an association of families with autistic members reported on social media that after an institution near Piraeus port closed, about 30 autistic residents were transferred to another facility, which was unsafe and equipped with inadequate staff. Association members uploaded photos of the residents in restraints. On March 3, the same legal representative also told media that one resident died from a lung infection associated with stress after the transfer. Government officials publicly committed to improve conditions after his death; no further information was available at year's end.

In his 2017 antidiscrimination report, the ombudsman described helping a totally blind individual obtain a handicapped parking pass for his vehicle, driven by his wife. Although the law does not explicitly provide handicapped parking spaces for blind individuals, the ombudsman intervened with municipal authorities to help them provide the parking pass under other statutes and to help them design regulations to govern similar requests.

On January 8 and February 28, the government launched new special education facilities in two separate locations around Athens; a special education primary and nursery school and a special education vocational school. On May 11, the deputy minister for education, research, and religions reported that 23 new special education schools had been established around the country. On July 18, the parliament passed legislation allowing third country nationals who hold residence permits on humanitarian grounds to receive disability allowances.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

While the constitution and law prohibit discrimination against members of minorities, Roma and members of other minority groups continued to face discrimination.

Although the government recognized an individual's right to self-identification, many individuals who defined themselves as members of a minority group found it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture. A number of citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks, Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites, or Macedonians. Some members of these groups unsuccessfully sought official government identification as ethnic or linguistic minorities. Courts routinely rejected registration claims filed by associations in Thrace with titles including the terms Turk and Turkish when based on ethnicity grounds, although individuals may legally call themselves Turks, and associations using those terms were not prohibited from operating. Government officials and courts denied requests by Slavic groups to use the term Macedonian in identifying themselves, stating that more than two million ethnically (and linguistically) Greek citizens also used the term Macedonian in their self-identification.

The government officially recognized a Muslim minority, as defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, consisting of approximately 100,000-120,000 persons descended from Muslims residing in Thrace at the time of the treaty's signature and including ethnic Turkish, Pomak, and Romani communities. Some Pomaks and Roma claimed that ethnically Turkish members of the Muslim minority pressured them to deny the Pomak and Roma ethnicities were distinct from Turkish and provided monetary incentives to encourage them to say they were ethnically Turkish. The government operated 148 primary schools and two secondary schools in the Thrace region that provided secondary bilingual education for minority children in Greek and Turkish. The government also

operated two Islamic religious schools in Thrace. Some representatives of the Muslim minority said these facilities were inadequate to cover their needs.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination, social exclusion, and harassment, including ethnic profiling by police and alleged abuse while in police custody, discrimination in employment, limited access to education, and segregated schooling. On May 3, opposition MP Thanassis Davakis stated while addressing an audience in Sparta, “I plea and forbid any Gypsy and the rest of them to vote for me, whatever the political cost... Whoever from this social group votes for me, I won’t recognize them... I am sorry to say that, I am sorry for the little children born to these people without being asked to and for the situation the children find themselves in.” Davakis later apologized.

Poor school attendance, illiteracy, and high dropout rates among Romani children remained problems. Authorities did not enforce the mandatory education law for Romani children, and local officials often excluded Romani pupils from schools or sent them to Roma-only segregated schools.

In cooperation with local authorities, the government announced on April 25 plans to assist Roma campers in moving to organized temporary living quarters, beginning with 45 Roma families residing in the Delphi area.

The Hellenic Police’s “Center for Security Studies” continued to implement a two-year program funded by the European Commission for the co-training of 378 police staff members with Romani cultural mediators aimed at countering mutual stereotypes and fighting Romani social exclusion.

RVRN documented 34 incidents involving racially motivated verbal and physical violence against refugees and migrants in 2017. Fourteen of these incidents were reported to police.

Local media and NGOs reported race- and hate-motivated attacks on migrants by far-right groups, including alleged supporters of Golden Dawn (GD), whose members of parliament publicly expressed anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and homophobic views. The trial of 69 GD members, including 18 current and former members of parliament, continued. They were charged with weapons crimes and operating a criminal enterprise.

On March 23, right-wing extremist group Krypteia claimed responsibility for a March 22 arson attack on an Afghan community center in central Athens that

caused significant damage but no injuries. According to press reports, assailants poured flammable liquid on the door of the community center and flames spread inside, damaging desks, tables, and computers. UNHCR condemned the attack, commenting that the center had been full of persons, including children, not long before the attack and called for steps to protect refugees and migrants. On April 2, the secretary general for human rights asked the Supreme Court head prosecutor to investigate the case.

On June 6, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Ministry of Justice held a workshop on “Building a Comprehensive Criminal Justice Response to Hate Crime.” During the workshop, authorities signed an agreement for interagency cooperation on these issues, including the establishment of a national hate crime database and continued capacity building for prosecutors and law enforcement officials.

On October 16, the Supreme Court prosecutor ordered a special investigation to determine whether a fire in June at a makeshift migrant workers’ camp in the agricultural area of Manolada was motivated by racism.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons when seeking housing, employment, naturalization, and government services such as health care. The government enforced antidiscrimination laws, which include sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating circumstances in hate crimes. Offices combatting racist and hate crimes include crimes targeting LGBTI individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in their mandates. LGBTI activists alleged that authorities were not always motivated to investigate incidents of violence against LGBTI individuals and that victims were hesitant to report such incidents to the authorities due to lack of trust. Violence against LGBTI individuals remained a problem, and societal discrimination and harassment were widespread despite advances in the legal framework protecting such individuals. LGBTI refugees and migrants reported incidents of rape, physical violence, and discrimination perpetrated by other refugees and migrants, and reported that authorities and NGOs did not adequately investigate these crimes.

RVRN reported in 2017 “the assaults recorded against LGBTI persons outnumbered all other types of assault but had decreased slightly.” RVRN did not record any incidents involving severe physical violence but only incidents of milder forms of violence and instances of repeated violence against the same individuals, including verbal abuse and personal injuries. RVRN reiterated observations from recent years about a firm tendency of perpetrators to target LGBTI activists and about the LGBTI community’s lack of trust in police. RVRN also noted an upward trend of cyber and social media attacks on individuals due to their LGBTI status. In 2017 RVRN recorded 29 incidents of attacks based on sexual orientation and another 18 based on gender identity. Five of these incidents resulted in injuries. According to RVRN organizations, only six of these 47 incidents were reported to police.

On September 21, a well-known LGBTI activist was beaten and killed in downtown Athens. On October 16, the Supreme Court prosecutor ordered an investigation and charged the two men who initiated the violence with grievous bodily harm. In December, after the final autopsy, four police officers accused of beating the activist while he was lying on the pavement to be handcuffed were charged with inflicting fatal bodily harm that resulted in the activist’s death.

On June 6, the NGO “Transgender Support Association” (SYD) issued a press statement denouncing the exclusion of transgender individuals from the police cadet recruitment process based on the assertion that they suffer from psychosexual disorders. SYD urged the Ministry of Interior and Hellenic Police to remove this exclusion because it violated the equal treatment law and stigmatized and offended transgender individuals.

On May 22, media reported on research findings from LGBTI rights advocacy youth group “Color Youth.” Color Youth conducted a survey among students to assess the prevalence of homophobia in schools, which found that about 85 percent of surveyed students attached a negative connotation to the word “gay;” 96 percent said they had heard comments about students not acting “in a manly way;” and approximately 75 percent said they had heard transphobic comments. Overall, one in three students said they have experienced some form of verbal harassment related to their perceived gender identity.

Unmarried transgender individuals over the age of 15 may update identity documents to reflect their gender identity without undergoing sex reassignment surgery. The law requires that a judge validate the change based on the individual’s external appearance. On June 4, SYD issued a press statement that

judicial officials often failed to properly apply this law; SYD alleged that judges did not always secure the necessary privacy for the hearing and often used derogatory language and employed an intimidating stance toward transgender individuals and their lawyers.

On June 26, media reported that a civil court in Thessaloniki accepted a refugee transgender woman's request that her asylum papers and residence permit reflect her gender identity. The Hellenic League for Human Rights, an NGO that supported the applicant in filing her claim with the court, called this a "pioneer decision" given the fact that the 2017 law did not openly grant this right to transgender individuals whose birth was not registered in the country.

The 14th Athens Pride Parade took place in June without incident. At the start of the seventh annual LGBTI Pride parade in Thessaloniki, two gay men were pushed into the sea. Six days later, media reported that police had launched an investigation into the incident. Twenty-two locally based Christian associations announced that they would boycott businesses sponsoring the Thessaloniki Pride event.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

While the law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment of HIV-positive individuals, societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS remained a problem. Persons with HIV/AIDS were exempt from serving in the armed forces on medical grounds. A presidential decree authorizes the dismissal of professional military staff members if a member diagnosed with AIDS does not respond to treatment, but there were no reports of military staff dismissals under this provision. There were also no reports of employment discrimination in the private or civil service sectors on the grounds of HIV/AIDS during the year. In 2017 a court in Athens ruled there was no obligation for HIV-positive individuals with a low viral load to disclose their condition, provided they followed their treatment plans and took precautionary measures. The court acquitted an HIV-positive male accused by his female partner of intentionally trying to transmit the disease to her by not revealing his medical condition.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers, with the exception of members of the military services, to form and join independent unions, conduct their activities without interference, and strike. Armed forces personnel have the right to form unions but not to strike. Police have the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike.

The law does not allow trade unions in enterprises with fewer than 20 workers and places restrictions on labor arbitration mechanisms. The law also generally protects the right to bargain collectively but restricts that right for persons under the age of 25. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and requires reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law allows company-level agreements to take precedence over sector-level collective agreements in the private sector. Civil servants negotiate and conclude collective agreements with the government on all matters except salaries.

Only the trade unions may call strikes. A strike may be considered unlawful if certain conditions and procedures are not observed, but also in the light of the proportionality principle, which enables courts to decide in each case whether the anticipated benefit from the strike is greater than the economic damage to the employer.

There are some legal restrictions on strikes, including a mandatory four-day notification requirement for public utility and transportation workers and a 24-hour notification requirement for private-sector workers. The law mandates minimum staff levels during strikes affecting public services. The law also gives authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order is obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempts individuals with a documented physical or mental disability from civil mobilization. The law explicitly prohibits the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strike actions before or after their proclamation. The government passed legislation on January 17 requiring at least half of the members of a first-level union to endorse a strike for it to be held. Previously, only a third of members were required to vote for a strike for it to be held.

The government generally protected the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties for violations of laws on freedom of association and collective bargaining, which provide for fines of 3,000 euros (\$3,450) and minimum three-month prison sentences, reportedly were insufficient to deter violations in all cases. Courts may

declare a strike illegal for reasons including failure to respect internal authorization processes and secure minimum staff levels, failure to give adequate advance notice of the strike, and introduction of new demands during the course of the strike. Unions complained that this deterred some members from participating in strikes. Administrative and judicial procedures to resolve labor problems were generally subject to lengthy delays and appeals. On February 2, media reported on a court decision removing a company's union from the official registry. The court found that six of the 24 employees who had signed the union's founding declaration were not on the payroll at the time the union was officially registered. Employees argued that the company was purposely hiring staff on a seasonal basis in order to exercise pressure and restrict their labor rights.

There were reports of antiunion discrimination. On January 26, media reported that an employee at a Thessaloniki airport business was allegedly fired for participating in a January 12 strike. Media also reported that the Board of the General Mining and Metallurgical Company (LARCO) suspended employees who participated in the January 12 strike from work for a week. Employees claimed that employers explicitly told them that they were punished for striking.

On April 25, the Union of Journalists suspended membership of 10 journalists working for "SKAI" media because they did not take part in a strike conducted on October 24 and 25. The suspensions ranged from six months to one year.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor and provides additional protections for children, limiting their work hours and their work under certain conditions. Although several government entities, including the police antitrafficking unit, worked to prevent and eliminate labor trafficking, there were reports of forced labor of women, children, and men, mostly in the agricultural sector. Forced begging (also see section 7.c.) mostly occurred in metropolitan areas and populous islands, focusing on popular metro stations, squares, and meeting places. Penalties for violations included more than 10 years in prison and fines of up to 100,000 euros (\$115,000) but were not sufficient to deter violations.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for employment in the industrial sector is 15, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age is 12 in family businesses, theaters, and cinemas. A presidential decree permits children who are 15 or older to engage in hazardous work in certain circumstances, such as when it is necessary as part of vocational or professional training; in this case a worker should be monitored by a safety technician or a medical doctor. Hazardous work includes work that exposes workers to toxic and cancer-producing elements, radiation, and similar conditions.

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties for violators ranging from fines to imprisonment. Information is not available on whether the penalties were sufficient to deter violations. Employers generally observed child labor laws in the formal economy. Trade unions, however, alleged that enforcement was inadequate due to the inspectorate's understaffing, and that the government did not adequately protect exploited children. On June 14, a researcher affiliated with the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) think tank reported 39,000 officially employed minors, 1,700 of which were migrants and refugees. The report found that the legislative framework punishing labor exploitation was adequate in terms of sufficient penalties, but prosecutors made no effort to identify when and where violations occurred.

Child labor was a problem in the informal economy. Younger family members often assisted families in agriculture, food service, and merchandising on at least a part-time basis. Family members compelled some children to beg, pick pockets, or sell merchandise on the street, or trafficked them for the same purposes. The government and NGOs reported the majority of such beggars were indigenous Roma or Bulgarian, Romanian, or Albanian Roma. There were reports that unaccompanied migrant children were particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation and worked mainly in the agricultural and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing sectors. On June 11, NGO ARSIS reported there were approximately 300 minors selling small items or begging on street corners in Thessaloniki.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex (including pregnancy), ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV/AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status.

The government did not always effectively enforce these laws and regulations. Penalties provided by law were not sufficient to deter violators. Penalties included prison sentences up to three years and fines up to 5,000 euros (\$5,750). Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, sex (including pregnancy), disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity occurred. There was discrimination against migrant workers (see section 7.e.).

On June 29, media reported that a store allegedly fired an employee after 10 years of service because she was suffering from multiple sclerosis. On April 24, a union of employees denounced “the unlawful and abusive dismissal” of a pregnant woman who was working at a pastry shop. The employee claimed the employer was treating her as “sick,” using derogatory language, and changing her responsibilities to encourage her to resign. The employee filed three complaints with the Labor Inspectorate about the employer’s behavior and her dismissal. On January 30, media reported that a first instance court in Piraeus ruled that the burden for proving a dismissal’s lawfulness fell on the employers and employees need not prove it unlawful, noting that there should be a well-grounded reason linked with the employee’s behavior or ability or the operational needs of the business.

In its 2017 report on equal treatment, the ombudsman found that pregnancy and maternity tend to consistently place working women at a disadvantage, as their absence from work for those reasons generally results in negative consequences for their employment rights, despite the increased legal protection provided to them for these particular periods of their lives. The ombudsman also noted women working in high-ranking jobs who return to their positions following maternity leave should legally return to the same job or an equivalent one. In practice, however, women often found themselves demoted when they returned to work.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage in the private sector for unspecialized workers age 25 or older was 26.18 euros (\$30.11) per day and for workers below 25 years of age, 84 percent of that amount, or 22.83 euros (\$26.25) per day. These wages were above the poverty income level. The government did not always enforce wage laws effectively, and penalties were not always sufficient to deter violations.

The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of one month per year, and sets limits on the amount of overtime work which, based on conditions, may exceed

eight hours in a week. The law regarding overtime work requires premium pay, and employers must submit information to the Ministry of Labor for authorization. Premium pay ranged from 20 to 80 percent of the daily wage, based on the total number of extra hours and the day (Sundays, holidays, etc.), and whether it was night service. Employers also provided compensatory time off. These provisions were not always effectively enforced in all sectors, particularly in tourism, catering services, retail businesses, agriculture, the informal economy, or for domestic or migrant workers.

Wage laws were not always enforced. Unions and media alleged that some private businesses were forcing their employees to return part of their wages and mandatory seasonal bonuses, in cash, after depositing them in the bank. On January 19, media reported the arrest of an employer caught asking his employee to return his Christmas bonus. On January 9, two employees in Larissa claimed they were dismissed because they refused to return their Christmas bonuses. Other employees were forced to falsely declare and sign that they had received their bonuses, although they had not. Several employees were officially registered as part-timers but in essence worked additional hours without being paid. Overtime work was not always registered officially and paid accordingly. In other cases employees were paid after months of delay and oftentimes with coupons and not in cash. Cases of employment for up to 30 consecutive days of work without weekends off were also reported. Such violations were mostly noted in the tourism, agriculture, and housekeeping services sectors.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety, setting the responsibility for identifying unsafe situations on occupational safety and health experts and not the workers. Workers have the right to file a confidential complaint with the labor inspectorate regarding hazardous working conditions and to remove themselves from such situations without jeopardizing their employment. Owners who repeatedly violate the law concerning undeclared work or safety could face temporary closure of their businesses. Under the same law, employers were obliged to declare in advance their employees' overtime work or changes in their work schedules. The legislation also provided for social and welfare benefits to be granted to surrogate mothers, including protection from dismissal during pregnancy and after childbirth. Courts were required to examine complaints filed by employees against their employers for delayed payment within two months after their filing, and to issue decisions within 30 days after the hearing.

On January 19, media reported that a Greek member of the European Parliament (MEP) reported to the European Commission that labor accidents in Greece had

increased 10 percent since 2010, according to statistics from the Hellenic Federation of Associations of Labor Inspectorates. The MEP said that the actual number was higher as many such accidents were going unreported.

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor legislation. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for all concerns regarding occupational safety and health at the national level. The Directorate of Security and Health in Labor, under the General Directorate for Labor and Labor Inclusion, and the Labor Inspectorate are the principal competent government authorities. The inspectorate's mandate includes the private and public sectors, except for domestic employment, mining, and marine shipping (which fall under the Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism and the Ministry of Maritime and Island Policy). Labor experts characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate.

The number of inspectors authorized to conduct labor inspections reportedly exceeded 1,000, including labor inspectorate personnel and staff of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Social Solidarity, the Social Insurance Fund, the Economic Crimes Division of the police, and the independent Authority for Public Revenue. Despite government efforts to increase inspections for undeclared, under-declared, and unpaid work, trade unions and media alleged that enforcement of labor standards was inadequate in the shipping, tourism, and agricultural sectors. Enforcement was also lacking among enterprises employing 10 or fewer persons. According to a survey carried out for the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), nine in 10 employees in the private sector faced worsening labor conditions in the years of the debt crisis. Private sector workers seem to be suffering more than public servants as the percentage of wage earners with net monthly wages in the private sector dropped at a higher rate than the public sector within the past nine years.

Businesses found hiring undeclared employees were closed by the authorities for a few days and if repeatedly found violating the law the business could be permanently closed. Employers who hire undeclared employees can face fines up to 10,500 euros (\$12,075) for each undeclared employee. A new law passed on July 18 imposes double fines on employers for repeat offenses within three years and triple fines for subsequent offenses. Employers can receive discounts on fines by hiring the undeclared staff on a long-term, full-time basis within 10 days of the fine's imposition. In 2017 the Ministry of Labor conducted inspections of 36,683 businesses in all sectors of the economy. Of these businesses, 5,357 were

employing a total of 8,335 undeclared staff. Authorities imposed fines amounting to 88.1 million euros (\$101 million).

On July 16, the minister of labor signed a decision to provide freelance and self-employed individuals (lawyers, engineers, doctors) with certain unemployment benefits with conditions. The benefit can be up to 360 euros (\$414) per month and payable for a period of three to nine months.

On July 18, the government also passed legislation holding contractors, sub-contractors, and those commissioning work equally responsible during the completion of work, enabling employees to demand payment, social insurance contributions, or other claims.