

GREECE 2019 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. On July 7, the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. A government formed by the New Democracy party headed by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis leads the country.

Police are responsible for law enforcement, border security, and the maintenance of order. They are under the authority of the Ministry of Citizen Protection. The same ministry undertook responsibility for prison facilities after the formation of the newly elected government in 2019. The Coast Guard is responsible for law and border enforcement in territorial waters and reports to the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Island Policy (renamed the Ministry of Shipping and Island Policy under the new government). The armed forces are under the authority of the Ministry of National Defense. Police and the armed forces 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.

Significant human rights issues included: unsafe conditions for detainees and staff in prisons; criminalization of libel; allegations of refoulement of refugees; gender-based violence against refugee women and children; acts of corruption; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) persons.

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.f., Protection of Refugees and section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

On June 6, the Movement United Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA) denounced police attacks on individuals before or during their detention. According to KEERFA, during the June 4 Eid al-Fitr celebration, police officers at the Menidi police station, in the Athens region, physically abused 11 Pakistani, Palestinian, Indian, and Albanian migrant detainees after the detainees asked to contact their relatives. Throughout the year media and human rights organizations alleged instances of illegal pushbacks and physical abuse of migrant and asylum-seeking individuals crossing the land border from Turkey into Greece. In most cases the victims alleged they were beaten and deprived of their personal belongings by law enforcement staff or by individuals perceived as law enforcement. The Hellenic police denied these allegations, noting that it thoroughly examined all such reports as they refer to unlawful practices. On June 11, a European Commission spokesperson expressed serious concern about these reports.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions had problems including severe overcrowding, insufficient security, lack of access to health care, inadequate access to food and sanitation, and inadequate supplies of resources. There were allegations of police mistreatment and physical and verbal abuse by police (also see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

Physical Conditions: According to government statistics published in June, prisons exceeded capacity: nationwide, prisons can accommodate 9,935 individuals and in June they held 10,764 inmates. Throughout the year several violent incidents occurred in prison facilities, in some cases resulting in the loss of human lives. In

the prison in Trikala, in central Greece, authorities recorded two murders of prisoners by prisoners, one on April 12 and another on May 1. On January 14, a foreign individual, accused of instigating the death of a lawyer, was killed with a makeshift knife by another detainee. On March 7, a clash among Russian-speaking and Albanian prison inmates resulted in the killing of a Greek inmate and injuries to eight others. On April 11, two prison inmates at the Korydallos prison were badly injured when other inmates flogged them with makeshift whips made of cords.

Police detained undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in Reception and Identification Centers (RICs). They were allowed some freedom of movement on the island after registration. Overcrowding continued to be a problem in detention and registration centers. The RICs, especially on the islands of Samos and Lesbos, offered poor housing conditions, sanitation, health services and security, according to intergovernmental bodies and international organizations such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and Oxfam. Locally based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), reiterated findings from previous years that severe overcrowding in the RICs caused distress and seriously affected mental health. The group accused Greece and the European Union in September of intentional neglect, arguing that the migrant centers were intentionally kept in dismal conditions to dissuade new arrivals. On February 9, media reported on the eight-month absence of a medical doctor at the RIC in Fylakio, Evros (near the Greek-Turkish border), before the MSF began to cover the gap.

Gender-based violence in migrant sites continued to be a major concern. There were also reports of faith-based violence, mostly targeting Christian populations in the RICs. Research in November 2018 conducted by the International Christian Consulate and published in local media in May found incidents of sexual violence and rape in Lesbos were used to coerce Muslims who had converted to Christianity to return to Islam. Authorities assigned some underage asylum seekers to “protective custody” in the same quarters as adults or in overcrowded and underresourced police stations with limited access to outdoor areas. On February 28, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) delivered its judgment in the case of “H.A. and others v. Greece” regarding the detention conditions of unaccompanied minors in police stations. The case concerned nine unaccompanied minors of Syrian, Moroccan, and Iraqi descent who were placed in protective custody in police stations in the northern part of the country. The ECHR found the applicants’ detention for a prolonged period of time in police cells was

inappropriate for minors, ruling the detention violated Article 3 of the Human Rights Convention. The ECHR also found the lack of information regarding the nature of the minors' detention and the absence of action by the public prosecutor, as their legal guardian, violated the convention. On June 13, the ECHR issued a similar ruling on a separate case concerning five unaccompanied Afghan minors placed under protective custody in 2016.

Police also detained rejected asylum applicants due to return to Turkey, some migrants waiting to return home under the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return Program, and migrants suspected of committing a crime in predeparture centers, which suffered from 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 (name changed to Ministry of Justice under the new government) 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 until November, when it started to severely restrict entry due to overcrowded conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Both the constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements. At times, especially prior to political gatherings held by government members, police acted pre-emptively to remove or briefly detain potential demonstrators on public peace and public order grounds. On March 5, the NGO Hellenic League for Human Rights issued a statement arguing that "pre-emptive police activity cannot result in a pre-emptive suspension of rights." The league asserted arbitrary arrests prior to planned or spontaneous demonstrations violate constitutional rights to

personal security and assembly (see also section 2.b., Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association).

NGOs reported incidents of security forces committing racially and hate-motivated violence. In an April 18 report, the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), a group of NGOs coordinated by UNHCR and the National Commission for Human Rights, reported law enforcement officials committed or were involved in 22 of the 117 incidents of racist violence recorded in 2018. Victims in these incidents included, among others, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors, and a Greek transgender woman. All such allegations claimed inappropriate behavior by law enforcement officials during routine or nonroutine police checks and operations. In 19 of the 22 cases, victims reported the physical violence occurred in public spaces or inside police departments in Athens. Police statistics were higher, with 226 potentially racially motivated incidents reported in 2018, 18 of which involved law enforcement officials as perpetrators.

On August 21, the Office of the Greek Ombudsman, in its capacity as the National Mechanism for the Investigation of Arbitrary Incidents in the security forces and the employees of the detention facilities, published a report for the period 2017-18. Among the 296 cases examined, 25 cases concerned torture and other infringements of human dignity, 49 cases involved the illegal use of a firearm, 10 cases had violations of sexual freedom, three cases of threatening rhetoric and action against life, 37 cases of threatening rhetoric and action against personal freedom, 145 attacks on physical integrity, seven cases of improper conduct, and 21 cases related to racism.

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 the 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. 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. Police are required to bring detainees before an examining magistrate within 24 hours of detention, but the latter may be granted additional time to present an adequate defense in some instances.

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. According to the penal code passed on June 11, pretrial detention should be authorized only if house arrest with electronic monitoring is deemed insufficient. Judicial authorities may impose limitations on freedom, including bail; require regular appearances at the local police station; and ban a suspect from exiting the country when there are strong indications the defendant is guilty of a crime punishable by at least three months in prison. In the case of final acquittal, the affected individual may seek compensation for the time spent in pretrial detention. Compensation procedures, however, were time consuming, and the amounts offered were relatively low (nine to 10 euros (\$9.90-\$11.00) per day of imprisonment). Based on Ministry of Justice statistics, approximately 31 percent of those with pending cases were in pretrial detention in January 2019.

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. On February 28, the Council of Appeals cleared, for the third time, the former head of the Hellenic Statistical Authority, Andreas Georgiou, of charges that he falsified 2009 budget data to

justify Greece's first international bailout. The Supreme Court prosecutor had twice revoked his acquittal by the Council of Appeals. Although technically possible, the current government has expressed no interest in revisiting the case. EU officials repeatedly denounced Georgiou's prosecution, reaffirming confidence in the reliability and accuracy of data produced by the country's statistical authority under his leadership.

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. According to legislative amendments, which were passed on February 26, a suspect or defendant has the right to seek compensation for damages resulting from public officials disrespecting the individual's presumed innocence at any time during proceedings. According to the same legislation, the burden of proof of guilt lies with the court and the defendant benefits from any doubt. The legislation responded to EU Directive 2016/343 "on the strengthening of certain aspects of the presumption of innocence and of the right to be present at the trial in criminal proceedings." Delays in trials occurred mostly due to backlogs of pending cases and understaffing. Trials are public in most instances.

Defendants have the right to communicate and consult with an attorney of their choice in a fair, timely, and public manner, and they are not compelled to testify or confess guilt. Lawyers, whether chosen by the defendant or appointed by the state, are provided adequate time and space inside prison facilities to consult with their clients and to 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 to 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 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 ECHR.

Property Restitution

The law addresses property restitution, and 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 religious artifacts allegedly stolen from the Jewish community of Thessaloniki in 1941; the community requested their return. 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. In 2018 the Supreme Court issued a ruling in favor of OPAIE for one of the properties. Following a proposal by the Jewish community to form a committee to discuss the disposition of the other properties, the committee was formed and held two meetings prior to July elections.

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. The Penal Code passed on June 11 provides higher penalties for unlawful access to electronic correspondence and mail: two years in prison (instead of one) or a fine. The law also outlines penalties for offenders working for telecom companies, ranging from one to three years in prison or payment of a fine.

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, skin 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.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. On June 10, the government passed legislation requiring vendors who sell print media to stock and display all Greek newspapers and magazines. Penalties for those intentionally breaking the law range from one year's imprisonment to a fine from 5,000 to 50,000 euros (\$5,500 to \$55,000). For repeated offenders, the penalty can increase to two years or more in prison.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists were subjected to physical attack, harassment, or intimidation due to their reporting in at least 10 instances. On April 7, a riot police officer in Idomeni, near the border with North Macedonia, kicked a photojournalist covering a migrant protest and later struck the photojournalist in the face and head with his shield. The government and journalist unions condemned the attacks. Seven attacks were led by members of far-right groups who targeted reporters and photojournalists covering rallies protesting the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. Anarchists led other attacks, once torching a journalist's car at her residence and on December 5, pelting a television crew stationed near the Athens University of Economics and Business with paint. There were no reports of police detentions in these incidents.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government did not censor media. The government maintains an online register with the legal status of local websites, their 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. On April 15, the government launched a similar electronic registry for regional and local press.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law provides criminal penalties for defamation. A law passed February 26 clarifies that individuals convicted of crimes cannot claim

slander for discussion of those crimes. This law also removes the provision requiring journalists to appear immediately before a court, or wait in jail until the court opened, in the case they were accused of libel, a provision that had been abused by politicians to intimidate journalists. On February 13, a court convicted then alternate health minister Pavlos Polakis for slander against a deceased reporter whom he had accused of taking bribes from the Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The court ordered the alternate health minister to pay financial damages to the journalist's family. The government abolished blasphemy laws, effective on July 1.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports the government monitored private citizens' online communications without appropriate legal authority. In November 2018 the newly established Committee on Internet Violations of Intellectual Property ordered domestic internet service providers to discontinue access for three years to 38 domain names offering pirated content. The committee set a 48-hour deadline from the time of the notification of the decision, threatening providers with a fine of 850 euros (\$935) for each day of noncompliance.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events. On March 14, four members of an ultrarightist group stormed into a theater in Thessaloniki and briefly interrupted a theatrical performance because they thought "it offended the divine." On March 3, media reported that a concert by the heavy-metal band "Rotting Christ" in a municipally owned venue in Patras was cancelled. Local authorities cited "technical problems" but the band leader alleged the performance was cancelled after pressure from the local church, which objected to the band's name.

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 Peaceful Assembly

There were, however, some complaints that police dispersed and briefly arrested demonstrators outside heavily secured venues, citing concerns of peace and public order (see also section 1.d., Arbitrary Arrest or Detention). On January 23, police detained 20 protesters outside the Megaro Mousikis concert hall in Athens where the then prime minister was scheduled to deliver a speech. According to those detained, police did not provide an explanation for their actions.

On January 29, the International Hellenic Association (IHA) criticized the Ministry of Defense for retracting an offer to provide space inside the War Museum's premises for an event entitled "Macedonia Is One and Greek." The IHA suggested the government was using its authority to quash dissenting views on the Prespa Agreement, a treaty between Greece and North Macedonia, which resolved a long dispute over the name "Macedonia."

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, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities). Such associations, despite the lack of legal recognition, continued to operate.

On September 13, a first-instance court in Serres, in northern Greece, decided to annul a decision by which it had granted official status to the local association Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood of Serres Locals. The annulment resulted from appeals by the Panhellenic Federation of Macedonian Cultural Associations and the local prosecutor. The Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood of Serres Locals had acquired official status through civil-court recognition in January 2018. Petitioners argued that the brotherhood's articles of association, providing for the preservation and promotion of the "local" language and the attribution of respect to "local" heroes, were deceitful and against public order. According to prosecution witnesses, the brotherhood's members purposely hid from the court its true goal of promoting locally the language and history of North Macedonia.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: Undocumented migrants arriving at Greek islands were subjected to special border reception and registration procedures and were not allowed to leave registration 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 identified as “vulnerable.” This group included unaccompanied minors; persons with disabilities; the elderly; pregnant women or those who recently gave birth; single parents with young children; victims of torture, shipwrecks, and other trauma; and victims of human trafficking. 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. As of September, however, no facilities were available on the mainland even though approximately 7,000 migrants had been deemed vulnerable. The government made efforts to increase placements in the mainland and decongest the island reception and registration facilities, but a steady flow of arrivals, which accelerated during the summer and fall, caused severe overcrowding.

Some local and international NGOs reiterated criticism of the government’s practice of confining asylum seekers to the islands for initial processing exceeding 25 days.

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).

e. Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. 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 December 16, UNHCR figures indicated 109,000 migrants and asylum seekers resided throughout the country.

On November 1, parliament amended the asylum legislation. The new rules are designed to speed up decision making on asylum applications and to increase the number of rejected applicants returned to Turkey or to their country of origin. The law, which will take effect on January 1, 2020, establishes extended periods of detention for asylum seekers; ties the treatment of asylum applications to the applicants' cooperation (or lack thereof) with authorities; alters the appeals committees so they consist exclusively of judges, dropping a position held by a UNHCR designate; requires appeals to be filed and justified through court briefs instead of standardized documents; eliminates "post-traumatic stress disorder" as a factor that would make a refugee considered "vulnerable" and therefore ineligible to be returned to Turkey if their asylum application is denied; and codifies that rejected asylum applicants should immediately return to Turkey or their country of origin. UNHCR, as well as local and international NGOs, including the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), the MSF, and many others, argued the law emphasized returns over protection and integration, put an excessive burden on asylum seekers, focused on punitive measures, and introduced tough requirements an asylum seeker could not reasonably be expected to fulfill.

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 asylum seekers, particularly those residing in RICs. The RVRN recorded 51 incidents involving racially motivated verbal and physical violence against refugees and migrants in 2018 (Also see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities.)

The separation and protection of vulnerable groups was not implemented at some sites. On February 9, the MSF reported that a 20-year-old male Yazidi refugee at the RIC in Fylakio, Evros, was living in a container with his visually impaired sister, his female cousin suffering from mental health problems, and three unrelated men. Media reported incidences of violence involving asylum seekers, including gender-based violence. On January 8, local and international media reported Oxfam's findings that asylum-seeking and refugee women were wearing diapers at night for fear of leaving their tents to go to the bathroom. In its report for the rights of "children on the move" in Greece, issued on June 14, the ombudsman noted that children at the RIC in Lesvos were at risk of sexual abuse

and exploitation, rape, and assault. The report stated many parents of children, especially single parents, were reluctant to queue for hours for food because they were afraid to expose their children to the risk of violence and sexual abuse. Cases of trading food in exchange for sex were also reported to the ombudsman. On April 11, PACE expressed serious concern regarding the humanitarian situation and the poor security of asylum seekers at RICs on the Greek islands as well as in centers on the mainland.

On January 23, a court in Thessaloniki sentenced a 50-year-old Iraqi man to 20 years' imprisonment for raping his 16-year-old daughter at a reception facility in Serres.

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 abuse. Some NGO representatives reiterated findings from previous years that even after reporting rapes to the authorities, some victims continued residing in the same camp with the perpetrators.

NGOs noted inadequate medical and psychological care for refugees and asylum seekers, especially in the six RICs, mainly attributed to the government's inability to hire medical doctors willing to serve in such facilities. Even when the government significantly increased the salaries and reissued calls for recruitment, medical doctors expressed minimal interest.

On February 8, a Communist Party delegation visit to the reception facility in Katsikas, Epirus, noted the absence of medical care, especially for women, newborns, and children, according to media reports.

NGOs also noted inadequate psychological care for refugees and asylum seekers, especially in the six RICs. The MSF reported that 25 percent of the children they worked with in the Moria RIC on Lesbos Island from February to June had either self-harmed, attempted suicide, or had thought about committing suicide.

The government cooperated with UNHCR, the IOM, and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of asylum seekers 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. On October 31, in a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court ruled that Iranian Sharareh Khademi should not be extradited to her country of origin as this would pose an “immediate risk to her life.” The court annulled the decision of a lower-level court that had ruled in favor of the extradition. Khademi and her daughter were victims of domestic violence by an abusive husband and father.

On June 19, the GCR announced it had filed a complaint with the Supreme Court that migrants and asylum seekers were being forced back across the border into Turkey from northeastern Evros in Greece. The GCR stated it had evidence backing the claims of several migrants and asylum seekers who said they were forced back. The GCR reported it had filed three lawsuits on behalf of six Turkish nationals, including a child, who claimed that local authorities had exercised violence to force them back into Turkey. Reportedly, one of the young women, forced back to Turkey, was arrested and taken to a Turkish prison. The GCR noted that despite the growing number of alleged pushbacks, there was no official government reaction.

On June 8, the group Racist Crimes Watch filed a complaint against Hellenic Police in Didimoticho, northern Greece, alleging local police staff beat with batons and fired plastic bullets at a 35-year-old Iraqi national and two Egyptian nationals, ages 18 and 26, prior to forcing them back to Turkey.

On May 5, media reported a letter addressed by the then minister for citizen protection Olga Gerovassili to the UNHCR representative in Greece in response to concerns about pushbacks in the Evros area by security officers. After an investigation, the then minister wrote that the alleged incidents were not proven true. She also noted the absence of any such reporting by Frontex officers who assist the Greek border police in their work. From January to April, police arrested 3,130 third-country nationals in the areas of Orestiada and Alexandroupolis.

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. Following the July 7 elections, the Ministry for Migration Policy was folded into the Ministry for Citizen Protection. 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, asylum procedures, and the IOM-assisted voluntary return programs. UNHCR assisted the government with briefings and distribution of multilingual leaflets and information packages on asylum and asylum procedures.

Human rights activists and NGOs working with asylum applicants reported long waits of up to two years for decisions due to time-consuming processes, pre-existing backlogs in the appeals process, and a limited number of appeals committees. Access to the asylum process for persons detained in predeparture centers was also a concern. In its annual report for 2018, the Greek ombudsman reported his office continued to receive complaints from asylum applicants about difficulties in scheduling an appointment and connecting with the Asylum Service system via Skype, especially in Athens and in Thessaloniki. On May 6, local media reported the Greek Asylum Service had a backlog of more than 62,000 cases while an estimated 5,500 new applications were submitted yearly by new entrants.

According to the Asylum Information Database report for 2018, published by GCR on April 21, the average period between preregistration and full registration was 42 days in 2018. The average processing time at first instance was reported at approximately 8.5 months in 2018. Approximately 80 percent of the 58,793 applicants with pending applications at the end of 2018 had not had an interview with the asylum service.

Major delays frequently occurred in the identification of vulnerable persons on the islands, due to a significant lack of qualified staff, which also impacted the asylum procedure.

Asylum applicants from countries other than Syria complained that their asylum applications were delayed while Syrian applications were prioritized. NGOs, international organizations, and human rights activists also reiterated concerns about the lack of adequate staff and facilities; 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 the 2016 joint EU-Turkey statement, every undocumented migrant crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands would be confined to a 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 (see also section 2.d., Freedom of Movement).

Employment: Recognized refugees and holders of asylum-seeker papers were entitled to work, although this right was not widely publicized or consistently enforced. In 2018 the managing board of the Greek Manpower Organization extended the right to register for official unemployment to asylum seekers 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 are granted to asylum seekers in possession of a valid residency permit; however, staffing gaps, a lack of interpreters, and overcrowded reception sites limited certain asylum seekers' access to these services. On July 13, the minister for labor and social affairs revoked a June 20 ministerial decree signed by his predecessor that simplified the process for asylum seekers to be granted a social security number (AMKA). The minister argued that the system of granting AMKAs would be re-examined, as it was abused by foreign nationals who should not have received a number. Several NGOs reported problems in securing access for asylum-seeking individuals to basic services, including treatment for chronic diseases. Legal assistance was limited and was offered via NGOs, international organizations, volunteer lawyers, and bar associations.

RICs on islands and in the Evros region continued to be overcrowded, with inadequate shelter, health care, wash facilities, and sewer connections creating security and health concerns. Housing conditions at reception facilities elsewhere on the mainland were generally better, although at times overcrowding hindered access to services. Due to a lack of space, the government in September opened temporary camps on the mainland, providing six-person tents to hundreds of migrants.

Unaccompanied minors living in "protective custody" in police stations had limited or no access to health care or medical services. As of November 30, according to the country's National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA), there were 257 unaccompanied children in protective custody (see section 1.c., 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 staff contracted by NGOs and international organizations. Media reported cases, especially on the islands, in which assigned staff were inadequate or improperly trained. On June 6, media reported that 40 employees from the Asylum Service offices in Attica, Korinthos and Patras attended a training seminar on statelessness, the Dublin Treaty, and gender-based violence to handle asylum cases more efficiently.

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, 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 encounter problems obtaining proper medication. Pregnant women in Evros reception and detention facilities continued facing problems in accessing proper medical and prenatal care.

The government failed to identify asylum seekers with nonvisible vulnerabilities, such as victims of torture and trafficking victims, due to gaps and shortages in skilled staff, including medical doctors, at the RICs, several NGOs reported. On January 1, the government officially launched a multidisciplinary national referral mechanism (NRM), which included appropriate standard operating procedures and referral forms. The NRM required first responders to inform and coordinate with the EKKA, when potential victims were identified for care and placement.

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

Temporary Protection: As of September 30, the government provided temporary protection to approximately 2,578 individuals who may not qualify as refugees.

g. Stateless Persons

Not applicable.

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: On July 7, the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. As a result of the elections, the New Democracy party gained a majority of the parliamentary seats and party leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis became the country's prime minister, succeeding a coalition of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) and ANEL (independent Greeks) parties, headed by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. Parties must receive at least 3 percent of the votes to win a seat in the country's parliament or in the European Parliament. In the government cabinet formed in July, less than 10 percent of those appointed--or two of the 21 ministers--were women. Legislation passed on March 26 requires a minimum of 40 percent distribution of male and female candidates in local, regional, national, and European Parliament elections.

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. Permanent and ad hoc government entities charged with combating corruption were understaffed and underfinanced. On July 17, law enforcement authorities arrested six medical doctors, three nurses, and an interpreter working at the hospital on Samos Island who allegedly sold bogus medical certificates to asylum seekers to facilitate their transfer to the mainland on health grounds. Hospital authorities noticed that many of the certificates issued

were identical and referred to cases and conditions that were not usually dealt with at the hospital.

On August 7, parliament passed legislation establishing a unified transparency authority by transferring the powers and responsibilities of public administration inspection services to an independent authority.

Corruption: Reports of official corruption continued. On January 16, a criminal court in Athens found 20 former government officials, private businessmen, and shipyard officials guilty of bribery and money laundering over a contract for the construction of four submarines by a foreign company at the Skaramangas shipyards. Among those convicted were a former defense ministry official and a French-Swiss banker. The court imposed suspended jail sentences ranging from five to 20 years for all but one defendant.

The government intensified efforts to combat tax evasion by increasing inspections and crosschecks among various authorities and by engaging in more sophisticated types of verifications of undeclared income, such as the use of surveillance drones over popular islands to make sure tour boat operators provide receipts to visitors. Furthermore, monthly lotteries offer taxpayers rewards of 1,000 euros (\$1,100) for using payment cards in their daily transactions. 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 from 10,000 to one million euros (\$11,000 to \$1.1 million).

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 2018 annual report, the office reported it received 15,644 complaints, of which 72 percent 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. On April 4, the head of the NCHR, Giorgos Stavropoulos, resigned in protest after the government added five members from the LGBTI community and two from the Romani community to the 25-member NCHR board. Stavropoulos asserted that the increase violated "the principle of equality," as other member organizations had only one vote.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under a law that took effect July 1, rape, including spousal rape, is a crime punishable by 10 years to life imprisonment in cases with multiple perpetrators or if the rape results in the victim's death. The previous limit was five to 20 years. Attempted sexual intercourse without consent is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Charges may be pressed ex officio, without the need of a complaint. If the victim does not wish to seek prosecution, the prosecutor may decide to drop charges. The law applies equally to all survivors, regardless of gender. On January 7, media reported research showing that only 200 of an estimated average of 4,500 rape incidents per year were officially reported (approximately one out of 22).

Penalties for domestic violence under the new penal code range from one to three years' imprisonment, depending on the severity of the violence. The previous range was two to 10 years. The court may impose longer prison sentences for crimes against pregnant or minor victims. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively when the violence was reported; however, some NGOs and

international organizations criticized law enforcement in migrant sites for not responding appropriately to victims reporting domestic violence. Experts estimated only 10 percent of rape and domestic violence cases reach the courtroom, noting that despite an adequate legislative framework, judges' personal biases and social norms that blame the victim were major obstacles. In the first half of the year, police reported identifying the perpetrators in 69 cases of rape and attempted rape. As of June, police had recorded 94 reported rape incidents, 67 of which were attempted rapes.

The government and NGOs made medical, psychological, social, and legal support available to rape survivors. On March 26, the government passed legislation "on the promotion of substantial gender equality and countering gender-based violence." The law aimed to promote gender equality in politics and businesses and to standardize the services provided in government shelters to victims of gender-based violence, including foreign national women with no legal status.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law requires mandatory prison sentences for persons who coerce or force female individuals to undergo genital mutilation.

Despite reports that migrant and refugee women residing in the country underwent FGM/C prior to their arrival in Greece, there was no concrete evidence FGM/C was practiced in the country. On February 2, the European Institute for Gender Equality issued a study estimating that 25 to 42 percent of migrant and refugee girls living in the country but originating from states in which FGM/C is practiced were at risk of FGM/C.

Sexual Harassment: Under the new penal code, penalties may be as high as three years in prison for sexual harassment, with longer terms applied to perpetrators who take advantage of their position of authority or the victim's need for employment. The previous penalty ranged from two months to five years. In his 2018 annual report, the ombudsman reported his office received 262 complaints pertinent to gender equality matters without specifying how many were related to sexual harassment. In reports from previous years, the ombudsman had 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 the same legal status between women and men. The government effectively enforced the laws promoting gender equality, although discrimination occurred, especially in the private business sector. Muslim minority members in Thrace can request the use of sharia with notarized consent of both parties (see also section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

On January 29, parliament passed legislation establishing in each university an unpaid committee entrusted with the promotion of gender equality. The law assigned academic senates to decide on the formation of such committees, to consist of nine members, including a student representative.

Legislation passed in March established a “National Council on Gender Equality” and created a certification for companies that comply with maternity leave laws, provide equal pay for male and female employees, and demonstrate gender equality in managerial posts. According to data issued by the Secretariat for Gender Equality on March 18, between October and December 2018, 44 percent of women were employed, compared with 60 percent of men.

In 2018 the government announced that to avoid gender bias in hiring decisions it would no longer reveal the gender of unemployed individuals it recommended for job vacancies. The government also decided to allow female victims of domestic violence residing in special shelters or lacking a 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 in such cases.

Child Abuse: Violence against children, particularly migrant, refugee, street, and Romani children, remained a problem. The NGO Smile of the Child reported 321 serious cases of abuse related to 623 children through its helpline SOS 1056 from January 1 to June 30. Of those children, 38 percent were younger than age six. The law prohibits corporal punishment and the 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.

In 2018 the government enacted legislation allowing foster care and adoption procedures to be completed in less than a year, making them a viable option for children in urgent need of protection. On February 7, parliament passed legislation giving an additional three months of paid leave to foster parents and parents with adopted children up to age six. Parents of children born to surrogate mothers are also entitled to three months of paid leave after the child's birth.

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 illegal child marriage was common in Romani communities, with Romani girls often marrying between the ages of 15 and 17, or even younger, and male Roma marrying between the ages of 15 and 20. The Hellenic Statistical Authority recorded the marriage of seven girls younger than age 15 in 2018. Throughout that year, the authority recorded weddings for 186 boys and 753 girls aged 15-19.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age of consent is 15. The law criminalizes sex with children younger than age 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, approximately 4,962 refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children resided in the country as of October 31. Only 1,760 of these children resided in age-appropriate facilities. 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. On June 14, the ombudsman issued a report about children on the move in the country, noting discrepancies in the administrative treatment of unaccompanied minors depending on where they entered the country, the agency that identified them, and their nationality.

In 2018 parliament passed legislation requiring a "legal guardian" for the daily care of each unaccompanied minor. The legislation allows older unaccompanied

minors to reside in semiautonomous living units, established a special body entrusted with the protection of minors and the monitoring of guardianship in each prosecution office, created a special directorate in the national government for the protection of unaccompanied minors, established a registry of certified guardians who meet certain criteria, established a registry of unaccompanied minors, and created a registry of shelters and facilities for unaccompanied minors.

Institutionalized Children: Activists condemned the use of protective custody for unaccompanied minors for prolonged periods, often in unsanitary, overcrowded conditions resulting from a lack of space 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/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish community in the country consisted of approximately 5,000 individuals. Anti-Semitic rhetoric remained a problem, particularly in the extremist press, social networking sites, and certain blogs. A Eurobarometer survey, conducted in December 2018, found that local citizens did not regard anti-Semitism as a major problem, despite a recent spate of attacks. Vandalism of Holocaust monuments and memorials continued in the city of Thessaloniki. On January 25, unknown perpetrators vandalized a monument marking the site of the former Jewish cemetery at Aristotle University campus in Thessaloniki. On January 28, Archbishop Ieronymos of the Greek Orthodox Church publicly denounced the attack, describing “the desecration and vandalism of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials” as “hideous acts that brutally offend our history, culture, nation, and faith.” On April 10, perpetrators vandalized two memorial metal plaques at the Thessaloniki port area dedicated to persons who perished during the Holocaust.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities (KIS) continued to express concern about anti-Semitic comments by some journalists in the mainstream media and by some religious leaders, including Greek Orthodox Church clerics. On May 13, the KIS reiterated concern about political cartoons and images in the mainstream media where political controversies were mocked with the use of Jewish sacred

symbols and comparisons to the Holocaust. The KIS issued the statement about a commentary on social media by journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, criticizing statements by the then main opposition leader. Vaxevanis, arguing that the former leader supported a seven-day work week, illustrated his commentary with a sketch of the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp where the phrase *Arbeit macht frei* (work sets you free) was paraphrased as “12 hours of labor liberates.” The KIS explained that the use of that sign for journalistic commentaries was unacceptable because it trivialized a symbol of horror and of Nazi barbarism.

On January 25, media reported a court tried in absentia an excommunicated Old Calendarist monk (the “father Kleomenis”), who attacked and vandalized the Holocaust Monument in Larissa in 2017. The court sentenced him to 18 months in prison and a fine of 7,500 euros (\$8,250).

On April 18, a misdemeanor appeals court in Thessaloniki sentenced a 62-year-old medical doctor to a suspended 14-month jail term for putting up an anti-Semitic sign in 2014 at his municipal practice which read, “Jews Are Not Welcome Here,” in German.

On May 3, a large Greek delegation, including Nikos Voutsis, the then parliamentary speaker, David Saltiel, president of Jewish Communities of Greece; and other members of parliament, participated in the 31st annual March of the Living at the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I also marched. The march highlighted the history of Greek Jews during the Holocaust, with the parliament speaker marking the occasion by presenting artifacts to the newly established permanent Greek exhibit in the Auschwitz museum. The latter was funded by parliament and organized through cooperation with the Jewish Museum of Greece.

On February 12, in a statement, the KIS hailed the adoption of the working definition of anti-Semitism in accordance with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance by the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education.

On July 13, Minister for Agricultural Development and Food Makis Voridis defended himself against accusations that he had expressed anti-Semitic views in the past. Voridis denounced “any intolerance on his part” that might be interpreted as anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi. On July 16, the KIS issued a statement that “it takes into consideration and values the explanations” provided by the minister and hoped

to see him undertake initiatives to demonstrate his sincerity and fight intolerance and anti-Semitism.

Trafficking in Persons

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

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 government enforcement of these provisions was inconsistent. In a February 11 report, local NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) noted that penalties for parking in places designated for persons with disabilities, including ramps and pathways for the blind, were only administrative, treated as plain parking offenses.

Most children with disabilities had the option of attending mainstream or specialized schools, unless 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; approximately 59 percent of students with disabilities were able to finish middle school. The main obstacles were shortages in transportation and a lack of infrastructure such as ramps, as well as audiovisual aids, staff, and regular funding. Despite progress in establishing new special-education school units and classes to help students with disabilities integrate in primary and secondary education, the ombudsman noted that integrating children with special needs into mainstream classrooms remained a problem.

Persons with disabilities continued to have poor access to public buildings, transportation, and public areas, even though such access is required by law. Access to buildings, ramps for sidewalks, and public transportation vehicles were the biggest concerns. Even ramps in the street were often too steep or rough to use, and ramps for public transportation were often out of order.

Experts also noted that while the Athens metro and the main airports were generally accessible, trains and most ships, including ferries, remained inaccessible

or partially accessible. The GHM reported that most court buildings, including the Athens First Instance Court, lacked accessibility for citizens, lawyers, and judges with disabilities.

A September 2018 memorandum cosigned by then minister for shipping and island policy and the National Association of Greeks with Paraplegia provides that shipping companies should make their vessels accessible and safe for persons with motor impairment by May 1. The decision obliged nautical transportation companies to install proper elevators and lifting devices, to designate specific disabled parking spaces and areas where wheelchairs could be secured, and to train their personnel to assist persons with disabilities onboard the vessels. While the law allows service animals to accompany blind individuals in all mass transit and eating establishments, blind activists maintained they occasionally faced difficulties accessing public transportation, places, and services.

The ombudsman reported that 14 percent of the complaints his office received were related to disability and chronic disease issues.

The GHM also reported instances of persons with disabilities not being able to vote in the local and European Parliament elections on May 25 and June 2. Domestic law obliges polling station committees (PSC) chairpersons to provide assistance by entering the voting booth or taking election materials outside the polling station if the person cannot enter. The GHM alleged that at times PSC chairs voted for their own preferred candidates.

The GHM noted a lack of homebound voting, effectively disenfranchising voters who cannot travel to polling stations. Inadequate physical infrastructure in public buildings used for voting, in most cases state schools, was one of the main obstacles for persons with disabilities.

On May 29, the government passed legislation lifting significant obstacles to the granting of Greek citizenship for persons with disabilities, which includes provisions for persons with intellectual disabilities or psychiatric illness. In general, the law on citizenship requires an interview with the applicant and several years of Greek schooling. The new legislation enables persons with disabilities, born or raised in the country by lawfully residing foreign nationals, to claim nationality. Under the previous law, persons who were unable to attend a Greek school could not file a petition for citizenship. Adult foreign nationals with certified mental or physical disabilities previously could not take and pass the Greek language knowledge and naturalization test.

According to government statistics, individuals with disabilities and chronic ailments represented 15 percent of all permanent hires in the public sector.

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. Citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks, Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites, or Macedonians. Some 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 ethnic grounds, although individuals may legally call themselves Turks, and associations using those terms were able to function regularly without legal status (see also section 2.b., Freedom of Association). Government officials and courts denied requests by Slavic groups to use the term Macedonian to identify themselves on the grounds that more than two million ethnically (and linguistically) Greek citizens also used the term Macedonian for self-identification.

The government officially recognizes a Muslim minority, as defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which consists of persons descended from Muslims residing in Thrace at the time of the treaty's signature. They include ethnic Turkish, Pomak, and Romani communities. Some Pomaks and Roma claimed that ethnically Turkish members of the Muslim minority provided monetary incentives to encourage them to say they were ethnically Turkish.

During the 2018-19 school year, the government operated 128 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 the facilities were inadequate to cover their needs, claiming the government ignored their request to privately establish an additional minority secondary school. The same representatives noted a decreasing trend in the number of primary minority schools, which the government attributed to the decreasing number of students. Per the law, any facility with less than five

students must temporarily suspend operations, with students referred to neighboring schools. For the 2019-20 school year, authorities announced that of the 20 schools that suspended operation in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, five were minority schools.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination, social exclusion, and harassment, including ethnic profiling by police, alleged abuse while in police custody, discrimination in employment, limited access to education, and segregated schooling.

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 his 2018 annual report, the Greek ombudsman noted that even when Romani children were enrolled in schools, authorities often failed to provide transportation.

On March 26, parliament passed legislation allowing the granting of Greek citizenship to stateless Roma born in the country but whose parents lacked official registration.

On April 17, media reported that the then alternate minister for social solidarity approved the relocation of 31 Romani families in Farsala, central Greece, to a new municipally owned site. On the same day, the municipality in Chalandri, northeast of Athens, reportedly hired two Romani cultural mediators to facilitate access for local Roma to social welfare services as well as the enrollment of adults into “second chance” schools.

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

On April 20, a court on Chios Island sentenced a 79-year-old man from a local village to 13 years’ imprisonment for shooting and injuring a 15-year-old Syrian refugee with a hunting rifle in July 2018.

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

The law prohibits discrimination against LGBTI persons in housing, employment, and government services such as education and health care. The government enforced antidiscrimination laws, which include sexual orientation and gender identity, as aggravating circumstances in hate crimes. Offices combatting race crimes and hate crimes include in their mandates crimes targeting LGBTI individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Violence against LGBTI individuals remained a problem. Societal discrimination and harassment of LGBTI persons 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. 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 a lack of trust.

In 2018 the RVRN recorded 18 attacks based on sexual orientation and 11 based on gender identity. In one incident the perpetrator was a law enforcement official who targeted a Greek transgender woman. Among the recorded assaults on grounds of sexual orientation, one incident of rape was reported. Six of the incidents resulted in injuries and were combined with verbal attacks and threats. In one of those cases, the victim was a minor male. Of the 11 incidents recorded on grounds of gender identity, three involved physical violence combined with threats and verbal assault. According to information communicated to the RVRN for the calendar year 2018, Hellenic Police recorded 226 incidents potentially involving racist motives, 40 of which were related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

On July 29, the *Newspaper of the Journalists* reported on the case of a male couple from Switzerland who, on their exit from a gay bar on the island of Mykonos, were kicked and punched by eight unknown male perpetrators. The victims said no one helped them, although there were witnesses.

On January 28, a first-instance court issued a guilty verdict against Metropolitan of Kalavryta and Aegialia Amvrosios for public calls to violence, hate speech, and abuse of his position in the church. The decision overturned a previous court's

decision to acquit Amvrosios. The court sentenced him to a seven-month suspended prison sentence and a fine of 10,000 euros (\$11,000).

On February 27, the Supreme Court prosecutor ordered a probe into the attempted eviction by the same metropolitan of an elderly man from a church-run retirement home for allegedly being gay.

Unmarried transgender individuals older than age 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. In 2018 the NGO Transgender Support Association (SYD) issued a press statement saying that judicial officials often failed to properly apply this law. The 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 February 19, media reported that a civil court on Lesbos Island allowed a Bangladeshi transgender refugee woman to change all her identification documents to match her appearance.

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 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.

On March 11, unknown arsonists attacked the premises of the NGO Positive Voice, which hosted a facility that conducted HIV tests for free. The perpetrators also removed the rainbow flag from the facade.

On April 13, media reported the Labor Inspectorate fined a private company that refused to accept the services of an HIV-positive employee who returned to work after long-term sick leave. The case reached the ombudsman's office, which found the company violated the antidiscrimination law and recommended a fine. The company tried unsuccessfully to prove it was unaware of the employee's health problem, while citing his professional inefficiency as the reason for the dismissal. During mediation talks with the Labor Inspectorate, the employer offered the employee the option to return at work but with less favorable terms, which he refused.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers, except 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. 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, for example based on 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 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 law also requires at least half of the members of a first-level union to endorse a strike for it to be held.

The government generally protected the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and effectively enforced the law. Penalties for violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining 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 strike. Administrative and judicial procedures to resolve labor problems were generally subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

There were some reports of antiunion discrimination. On August 18, the Corfu-based Union of Hotel Employees protested the dismissal of a hotel employee who had successfully claimed some of his unpaid wages. On May 24, media reported on the dismissal of a restaurant employee in Thessaloniki who had testified in favor of three former colleagues, supporting their claim that they were unlawfully dismissed and should return to their posts.

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., Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment) mostly occurred in metropolitan areas and populous islands, focusing on popular metro stations, squares, and meeting places. Penalties for violations were insufficient to deter violations.

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

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 age 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 such cases workers 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, which was placed under the authority of the General Secretariat for Labor at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs by a presidential decree issued on July 17, is responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties for violators ranging from fines to imprisonment. Penalties were sufficient to deter violations 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. In 2018 a researcher affiliated with the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) think tank reported 39,000 officially employed minors, 1,700 of whom were migrants and refugees. The report found that the legislative framework punishing labor exploitation was adequate in terms of 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 unaccompanied migrant children were particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation and worked mainly in the agricultural and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing sectors. On October 17, the NGO ARSIS reported it had identified approximately 750 minors, from January to September, who were selling small items, or working or begging in the streets of Thessaloniki. Approximately 450 of these children were unaccompanied minors, and 95 originated from Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, religion, national origin, skin color, sex (including pregnancy), ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, 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. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, sex (including pregnancy), disability, HIV status, social status, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity occurred.

In its 2018 report on equal treatment, the ombudsman reiterated previous findings about pregnancy and maternity being treated by the employers as problems, at times resulting in dismissals from work. The ombudsman reported cases of interventions with employers in the state and private sectors in support of employees who faced discrimination on grounds of disability, age, sex, and social status. The ombudsman also interfered with businesses announcing job openings but setting age limits and gender preconditions which could not be explained by the type of the required services.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

By ministerial decree the government set the national minimum salary for employees in the private sector and for unspecialized workers. 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 an additional 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 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. Several employees were officially registered as part-timers but in essence worked additional hours without being paid. Overtime work was not always registered

officially or paid accordingly. In other cases employees were paid after months of delay and oftentimes with coupons, not cash. Cases of employment for up to 30 consecutive days of work without weekends off were also reported. Such violations were noted mostly in the tourism, agriculture, and housekeeping services sectors. On May 13, the Labor Inspectorate imposed a fine of 435,000 euros (\$478,000) on a home-improvement and gardening retailer for forcing its staff to work longer hours. During an inspection conducted on January 29, authorities found 29 employees working beyond their standard schedule.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety, placing 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.

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor law. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible for all concerns regarding occupational safety and health at the national level. Per the July 17 presidential decree, in addition to the Labor Inspectorate, the General Directorate for Labor Relations, Health, Safety and Inclusion at Work was also brought under the General Secretariat for Labor. The latter are the principal competent government authorities overseeing labor conditions in both private and public sectors, except for mining and marine shipping (which fall under the Ministry of Development and Investment and the Ministry of Shipping and Island Policy, respectively). Labor experts characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate.

According to government statistics for 2018, the percentage of undeclared work fell significantly to almost 9 percent in 2018, from almost 12.5 percent in 2017. On January 9, the government announced the deployment of an additional 44 employees to labor inspection services, setting a target of having 950 labor

inspectors. On October 15, the government reported intensified efforts to uncover instances of undeclared work through increasing onsite labor inspections. 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. Nonetheless, trade unions and media reiterated 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 GSEE, nine in 10 employees in the private sector faced worsening labor conditions in the years of the debt crisis. The percentage of wage earners with net monthly wages in the private sector has fallen at a higher rate than the public sector during the past nine years.

On August 9, the government abolished recently passed provisions of the previous administration regarding the liability of the contractor and subcontractor to provide grounded reasons for the legal termination of an employee's contract. On October 31, the parliament passed legislation providing for a 12 percent increase in the hourly wage of part-time workers for every additional hour worked above the four-hour ceiling. The same law also changed the calculation of overtime for the first five hours worked after a 40-hour work week. Those hours would not be considered overtime, but employers are required to pay an additional 20 percent of the hourly wage of the employees.