

GREECE 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority is vested in a unicameral parliament, which approves a government headed by a prime minister. In July 2019 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 in 2019. The Coast Guard, responsible for law and border enforcement in territorial waters, reports to the Ministry of Shipping Affairs and Island Policy. 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. Border protection is coordinated by a deputy minister for national defense. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police, Coast Guard, and armed forces, and the government had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse. Members of security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: the existence of criminal libel laws; unsafe and unhealthy conditions for migrant and asylum-seeking populations detained in preremoval facilities or residing at the country's six reception and identification centers, including gender-based violence against refugee women and children in reception facilities; allegations of refoulement of refugees; acts of corruption; violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups, including some by police; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons.

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

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organizations and international organizations regarding the lack of government investigation of and accountability for allegations of forced returns of asylum seekers.

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 members of racial and ethnic minority groups, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, demonstrators, and Roma (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees, and section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups).

In April a report published by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CPT) referenced cases of mistreatment by police, especially of foreign nationals and persons from the Roma community, a problem that is a frequent practice throughout the country. CPT also reported receiving a high number of credible allegations of excessive use of excessive force, of unduly tight handcuffing upon apprehension, and of physical and psychological mistreatment of criminal suspects during or in the context of police interviews. Some allegations involved the application of a plastic bag over the suspect's head during police interviews, reportedly with the aim of obtaining a confession and a signed statement. None of the persons who alleged mistreatment was allowed to

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make a phone call or to contact a lawyer during their initial questioning by the police.

The CPT received a great number of allegations of verbal abuse of detained persons, including racist and xenophobic remarks by police officers. The CPT conducted ad hoc visits to detention and reception facilities around the country on March 13-17, publishing findings from these visits in a report issued on November 19. The report reiterated findings from previous visits, with a number of detained migrants alleging they had been mistreated by Hellenic Police and Coast Guard officials upon apprehension or after being brought to facilities for detention. According to the report, several migrants alleged they were slapped in the head, kicked, and hit with truncheon blows. In some cases the reports were supported by medical evidence. The report also concluded that conditions for detainees held in at least four facilities in Evros and in Samos amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment (see “Prison and Detention Center Conditions”).

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Movement United Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA) reported police at the Menidi police station physically abused 11 Pakistani, Palestinian, Indian, and Albanian migrant detainees after the detainees asked to contact their relatives (see section 6, “National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups”).

Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces, although NGOs and international organizations complained there was a lack of government investigation of and accountability for violence and other alleged abuses at the border by the coast guard and border patrol forces.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions included severe overcrowding, insufficient security, lack of access to health care, inadequate access to food and sanitation, and inadequate supplies of resources. Prisoners alleged police mistreatment and physical and verbal abuse (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

Physical Conditions: According to government statistics published in November, prisons exceeded capacity. Nationwide, prisons can accommodate 10,055

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individuals; as of November 16, they held 11,468 inmates. Facilities in Volos, central Greece, in Komotini, Evros, and in Tripoli, Peloponnese, exceeded capacity by 219, 220, and 194 percent respectively. An April 9 CPT report referenced instances of women being placed in the same detention area with unrelated adult men, with cell doors left open during the day, thus allowing men to mix with women without adequate supervision. According to the CPT, for most prisoners, work inside prison was largely notional with a lack of organized recreational sports or vocational activities.

On July 23, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Greece violated Articles 3 (prohibition inhuman and degrading treatment) and 13 (right to an effective remedy) during the detention of two foreign nationals in overcrowded and substandard conditions in the Malandrino prison. The court awarded damages of 24,000 euros (\$28,800) for both complainants and an additional 2,000 euros (\$2,400) for trial expenses.

Fewer violent incidents among detainees occurred in prison facilities compared with the previous year, and there was no loss of life. The government conducted regular and extraordinary inspections for drugs and improvised weaponry. In March prison authorities reportedly conducted 639 inspections in facilities throughout the country. In April the government reported special measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the penitentiary system, including disinfecting prison facilities and government-owned vehicles, and establishing special wings in Athens and in Thessaloniki to isolate confirmed COVID-19 cases. On several occasions, inmates complained that government COVID-19 protection measures were inadequate, with over-congested conditions, insufficient testing, and a lack of access to medical and pharmaceutical care.

On November 19, the government began demolition and construction activities at the site of a former NATO base, in Aspropyrgos, in western greater Athens, where a new prison facility will be built to replace the Korydallos prison complex.

Police detained undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in overcrowded reception and identification centers (RICs) on five islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos) and one on the mainland in Evros until the individuals were identified and registered. Individuals were also held in detention facilities and

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preremoval centers. Following registration at the RICs, residents were allowed some freedom of movement, although it was significantly reduced as part of the government's efforts to avoid a COVID-19 outbreak.

The RICs, in addition to being overcrowded, provided generally poor housing conditions, insufficient washing and sanitation facilities, as well as poor health services and low security, according to reports by local and international organizations such as Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, the Greek Council for Refugees, and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF). Citing concerns related to COVID-19, MSF warned about the impossibility of maintaining social distancing and engaging in frequent hand washing under such overcrowded and poor conditions. MSF reiterated concerns regarding serious negative mental health impacts from overcrowding. In August and September, several cases of COVID-19 were confirmed among residents of the Vial RIC on Chios and the Moria RIC on Lesbos. On September 9, the Moria Center was destroyed by fire, leaving its more than 12,000 residents without immediate shelter.

On May 22, a female Afghan asylum seeker allegedly stabbed in the neck and killed another female conational at the Moria Center. On July 27, an Afghan resident at the Moria RIC was stabbed to death by three other residents. From January 1 through July 27, local police in Lesbos reported 18 knife attacks at the Moria Center, resulting in six deaths and 14 individuals seriously injured and hospitalized. Gender-based and domestic violence in migrant sites continued to be a major concern, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown.

To address chronic problems at the RICs exacerbated by increased migrant and refugee flows from Turkey to Greece throughout 2019, the government on January 15 issued a presidential decree reinstating a separate and independent Ministry for Migration and Asylum which took over responsibility for the RICs and the refugee sites from the Ministry of Citizen Protection. As part of the government's measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, approximately 2,000 asylum seekers with health vulnerabilities were transferred from the RICs to the mainland by June. Other measures included placing special containers at the RICs wherefor medical doctors could examine suspected COVID-19 cases, hiring additional medical staff, establishing automated bank teller machines inside the RICs to reduce movement

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outside the RICs, and a temporary ban on travel to the islands. Movement restrictions outside the RICs applied for most of the year (see section 2.d., Freedom of Movement).

Police also detained in predeparture centers rejected asylum applicants scheduled to be returned to Turkey (which stopped accepting returns on March 16 due to COVID-19), migrants waiting to return home under the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return Program, undocumented migrants, and migrants suspected of committing a crime. Predeparture centers suffered from overcrowding, limited access to outdoor areas, unsanitary conditions, and limited access to medical treatment, psychological counseling, and legal aid.

In its November 19 report, the CPT reiterated similar findings after visiting a number of migrant detention facilities around the country. The CPT noted that conditions for detainees, including women and children held in at least four facilities in Evros and in Samos, amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment. Detainees in those facilities were allocated less than one square meter of surface per person. The CPT noted that migrants continued to be held in detention facilities with large, barred cells crammed with beds (or sometimes no beds, just filthy mattresses or blankets on the floor), poor lighting and ventilation, and broken and dilapidated toilets and washrooms, inadequate food, insufficient personal hygiene products and cleaning materials, no access to outdoor daily exercise, including for children, no interpretation services, and no access to doctors or lawyers. Often, individuals were held without having knowledge of the reason for their detention.

Administration: Independent authorities investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions. The Ministry of Citizen Protection, through the Secretariat General for Anticrime Policy, 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. Government officials controlled access to RICs and official migrant and asylum-seeker camps for NGOs, diplomatic missions, and foreign and

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domestic journalists, requiring them to submit formal access requests with advance notice for each specific site. For most of the year, special COVID-19-related restrictive measures applied to the RICs and to refugee and migrant accommodation facilities. These measures banned outside visits and limited the range and the duration of residents' movement outside these facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Both the constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and give any person the right to challenge the lawfulness of an arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements. The ombudsman, through the National Preventive Mechanism for the Investigation of Arbitrary Incidents, received 208 complaints in 2019, most of which related to police. The CPT noted that the system for investigating allegations of mistreatment was not effective, as only a few cases resulted in disciplinary sanctions or criminal sentences.

NGOs reported incidents of security forces committing racially and hate-motivated violence. In a July 16 report, the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), a group of NGOs coordinated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the National Commission for Human Rights reported that law enforcement officials committed or were involved in 11 of the 100 incidents of racist violence recorded in 2019. Victims in these incidents included, among others, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors, a same-sex couple, and a transgender woman. The victims alleged inappropriate behavior by law enforcement officials during police checks and operations in public spaces, inside police departments in Athens, and in reception or detention centers. The report included 282 cases of racist violence reported to police in 2019, of which 19 were allegedly committed by police.

NGOs, universities, international organizations, and service academies trained police on safeguarding human rights and combating hate crimes and human trafficking.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and requires judicial warrants for arrests, except

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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. 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 up to 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 detainees may be granted additional time to present an adequate defense. The CPT reported complaints from individuals who said they were not allowed while in custody to promptly notify a close relative or a lawyer during the initial period of detention, particularly before or during questioning by police, when the risk of intimidation and mistreatment is greatest. The law typically provides such guarantees only after a person is formally accused of a criminal offense rather than from the outset of custody. Regarding access to a lawyer, the CPT noted that individuals who lacked financial means often met a lawyer only during their bail hearing for bail. The CPT reiterated such findings in its November 19 report.

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. The CPT reported receiving many complaints from foreign detainees that they had not been informed of their rights in a language they understood or had signed documents in Greek without knowing their content and without assistance from an interpreter. The CPT reported these findings in November. 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. On May 26, parliament amended the law regarding free legal assistance. The new law allows more experienced lawyers to undertake penal cases as part of a free legal assistance program and expands the program during the stages prior to trial.

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On April 28, the Greek Helsinki Monitor, as part of its Racist Crime Watch program, filed a report to the police department tasked with combatting racist violence accusing a police officer at a police station in Agia Paraskevi, in Athens, of legal violations against undocumented foreign nationals by using racist language and making insults each time the inmates asked for food or hygiene products while detained for months in the station's holding cells.

Arbitrary Arrest: The government placed some unaccompanied minors into what it called protective custody at local police stations, due to a lack of other suitable housing. The CPT found during a visit to the Omonia police station in Athens that three unaccompanied minors, including a 14-year-old boy, waiting for a medical screening, were kept under protective custody in a cell with unrelated adult men for between one and five days (see section 1, Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions). On November 18, the Ministry for Migration and Asylum reported that no unaccompanied minors were in protective custody, ending the practice that had been criticized by human rights organizations. All unaccompanied minors are to be housed in suitable long-term and short-term facilities.

Pretrial Detention: Prolonged pretrial detention resulting from overburdened and understaffed courts remained a problem. By law 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 time spent in pretrial detention. Compensation procedures, however, were time consuming, and the amounts offered were relatively low--nine to 10 euros (\$11.00 to \$12.00) per day of imprisonment. Ministry of Justice statistics show that as of January approximately 26 percent of those with pending cases were in pretrial detention.

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

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judiciary was at times inefficient and sometimes subject to influence. Authorities respected court orders. Observers continued to track the case of Andreas Georgiou, who was the head of the Hellenic Statistical Authority during the Greek financial crisis. The Council of Appeals has cleared Georgiou three times of a criminal charge that he falsified 2009 budget data to justify Greece's first international bailout. At year's end the government had made no public statements whether the criminal cases against him were officially closed. Separately, a former government official filed a civil suit in 2014 as a private citizen against Georgiou. The former official said he was slandered by a press release issued from Georgiou's office. Georgiou was convicted of simple slander in 2017. Georgiou appealed that ruling, and at year's end the court had not yet delivered a verdict.

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 passed in 2019, 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 legal proceedings. According to the same legislation, the burden of proof of guilt lies with the court and the defendant benefits from any doubt. Delays in trials occurred mostly due to backlogs of pending cases, understaffing, and the lockdown imposed due to COVID-19. 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.

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A law enacted in 2019 limited the use of sharia (Islamic law) to only family and civil cases in which all parties actively consent to its use.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

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

Property Restitution

The law addresses property restitution, and 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 calling for the return of the community's prewar archives. On several occasions throughout the year, Alternate Foreign Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis publicly urged the return of these archives. Additionally, the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw held religious artifacts allegedly stolen from the Jewish community of Thessaloniki in 1941; the community continues to request their return. The Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece (OPAIE) claimed more than 100 properties owned by Jews before the war are now occupied as government facilities. In 2018 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of OPAIE regarding one of the properties. Following the ruling, a committee of government appointees and representatives of the Central Jewish Council was established in 2019 to negotiate the fate of the remaining properties. At the end of the year, negotiations were ongoing.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly on July 29, 2020, can be found on the Department's website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>

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

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

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for the press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the press.

Freedom of Speech: 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.

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. Minority media owners in Thrace, northern Greece, where members of the country's recognized Muslim minority reside, complained that unlike numerous other media owners throughout the country, they did not receive government funding to promote the widespread *Menoume spiti* (We stay at home) campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 the government passed legislation requiring vendors who sell print media to stock and display all Greek newspapers and magazines.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists were subjected to physical attack, harassment, or intimidation due to their reporting in at least 12 instances. On January 19, unidentified perpetrators, allegedly far-right supporters, attacked and injured a Deutsche Welle journalist, Tomas Jacobs, who was covering a rally against migrants and refugees. According to the journalist, who is also one of the

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scriptwriters of a documentary about the Golden Dawn neo-Nazi movement in the country, the perpetrators confirmed his identity before the attack. The victim also claimed that police in the area did not come to his rescue. The government, mainstream political opposition, and the Foreign Press Association denounced the attack.

On March 1, angry residents in Lesbos verbally and physically attacked three foreign journalists covering their attempts to stop a dinghy carrying migrants and asylum seekers from landing at a small port. On July 27, unknown perpetrators shot Stefanos Chios, journalist and publisher of the ultra-sensationalist news site *Makeleio*, injuring him severely. Anarchists spray-painted the walls of media outlets on January 16, wrote insults targeting a journalist outside his residence on February 6 and on March 24 claimed responsibility for setting fire to the entryways to two journalists' residences. On February 3, unknown perpetrators exploded the publisher's parked car.

On November 11, NGOs Media Freedom Rapid Response and Reporters Without Borders sent a letter to the chief of police and to the minister of interior protesting the eight-hour-long October 19 "arbitrary detention" of a four-member German media crew on Samos for the production of a film on climate-induced migration. During their detention, they claimed they were subjected to questioning and harassment, and were denied food by officers who were not wearing protective masks. The police reportedly suspected them of espionage because they had used a drone to take camera shots from a beach next to a military site but the crew members firmly denied they were filming the site in question.

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 their tax office. 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 must 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. In 2019 the government launched a similar electronic

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registry for regional and local press.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law provides criminal penalties for defamation and libel. A law passed in 2019 clarified that individuals convicted of crimes cannot claim slander for discussion of those crimes. The same 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 September 14, media reported that a court awarded 160,000 euros (\$192,000) to a Greek correspondent in the United States, Thanos Dimadis, for being slandered by a former minister. The court cited “personal and professional damage” against Dimadis, ruling he had been wrongly accused by the minister and his associates of spying on them during their visit to New York in September 2016. Members of the ministerial delegation had stated in public that the correspondent had been arrested by police in New York for his behavior, an allegation the journalist denied and proved to the court to be slanderous.

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.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events. Government restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic forced some cultural and artistic events between March and November to be rescheduled or cancelled.

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, albeit with restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Due to COVID-19, the government banned gatherings of more than nine or 10 individuals during the lockdowns. On July 10, the parliament separately passed non-COVID-related legislation on public open-air gatherings. The law requires prior and timely announcement--in writing or via email--of the gatherings to the competent police or coast guard authorities and makes protest organizers accountable in case of bodily harm or property damage if they have not followed requirements for notification and precautionary measures. Some parliament members and analysts called the law unconstitutional and antidemocratic, arguing it infringes the right of assembly.

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 unobstructed.

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. Some of these freedoms were partially suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, although the restrictions were put in place by region and did not target specific groups. The government enforced restriction measures at all six RICs, including a ban on movement outside nearby towns from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., with movement otherwise allowed only in small groups of up to 10 persons. Visitors were generally banned from RICs. Similar measures also applied to migrant and refugee

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accommodation centers. Human rights groups criticized the restrictions as being more severe than those on the general population.

In-country Movement: Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers arriving at Greek islands were subject to special border reception and registration procedures and were not allowed to leave registration centers for up to 25 days. After this 25-day period, undocumented migrants remaining in those facilities were generally allowed to enter and exit but were prohibited from travelling to the mainland unless they successfully filed asylum applications.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, border reception and registration procedures were adapted to provide medical tests to all newly arriving migrants and asylum seekers and require 14 days of quarantine in a special facility. A law passed May 12 states that asylum seekers deemed “vulnerable” are not eligible to receive expedited examination of their asylum claims or to be transferred to the mainland on vulnerability grounds alone. Once asylum applicants were granted refugee status, they could move off the islands. Those with admissible cases and likely to receive refugee status could also be transferred to the mainland, space permitting. The government also allowed some asylum seekers in poor health to transfer from congested island registration and reception facilities to less-congested facilities in the mainland as a precautionary measure against COVID-19.

Despite government efforts to increase placements in the mainland and decongest the north Aegean islands, local residents and authorities strongly resisted receiving asylum seekers, even in privately owned facilities such as hotels. Restrictions on movements also applied to mainland accommodation centers as a result of the pandemic.

Local and international NGOs reiterated criticism of the government’s practice of confining asylum seekers to the islands and employing “protective custody” for unaccompanied minors (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions). Local and international organizations expressed criticism and concern over a law passed on May 12 establishing closed and semi-closed facilities for the temporary reception of asylum applicants, arguing that deprivation of liberty would become the norm for most asylum seekers. NGOs such as MSF

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criticized the government's decision to apply increased movement restrictions on residents of all six RICs and other reception facilities around the mainland due to COVID-19. MSF called the measure "discriminatory."

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

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

On February 28, Turkish president Erdogan announced that the borders Turkey shares with the EU were "open," prompting over 50,000 refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants to move to the border areas. Some local Turkish officials provided free buses to aid refugees' mass movement to the border, according to humanitarian organizations and rights groups.

Citing national security concerns, Greece suspended receiving any asylum claims until April 3 but permitted those who had entered the country since February 28 to apply for asylum starting April 1. International and local human rights agencies and organizations, including Oxfam, the Greek Council for Refugees, and the UN special rapporteur for the rights of migrants, raised concern about the deprivation of liberties. On March 9, the European Court for Human Rights rejected an application filed by three Syrian nationals to lift the government's suspension of reception of new asylum claims.

On March 11, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government again suspended asylum services that could not be conducted electronically or with social distancing, but required a physical presence. During this period the government extended the deadline for asylum seekers to apply for and renew residence permits. The government also extended the deadline from March 31 to May 31 for recognized refugees to remain in the cash assistance program and in government-funded housing.

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On July 6, the NGO Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) reported that the public prosecutor on Lesbos pressed criminal charges for illegal entry against asylum seekers who arrived on the island during March, when the government had suspended asylum applications. HIAS reported that the lives of approximately 850 persons were impacted by the prosecutor's decision. According to HIAS, "the criminal prosecution of asylum seekers for unauthorized entry, while the government itself had suspended submission of new asylum applications is illegal."

During the year, the flow of migrants and asylum seekers to the country from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East continued, though in reduced numbers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and enhanced border protection surveillance. As of September 30, UNHCR figures indicated 121,100 migrants and asylum seekers resided in the country.

On January 1, a law amending asylum regulations took effect. The law was designed to speed up decision-making on asylum applications. It established extended periods of detention for asylum seekers and ties the treatment of asylum applications to the applicants' cooperation (or lack thereof) with authorities. It altered the composition of the appeals committees to consist exclusively of judges, dropping a position held by a UNHCR designate. The law required appeals to be filed and justified through court briefs instead of standardized documents, eliminated post-traumatic stress disorder as a factor for designating whether a refugee was considered "vulnerable" and therefore ineligible to be returned to Turkey or their country of origin if their asylum application is denied, and. It codified that rejected asylum applicants should immediately return to Turkey or their country of origin. UNHCR, local and international NGOs, including the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the Greek Council for Refugees, MSF, and other organizations argued the law emphasizes returns over protection and integration, puts an excessive burden on asylum seekers, focuses on punitive measures, and introduces requirements an asylum seeker could not reasonably be expected to fulfill.

On March 10, the government passed legislation reducing free shelter and cash assistance benefits to asylum seekers to one month (down from six months) after

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receiving refugee status, with the exception of unaccompanied minors. On May 12, the government amended the asylum law so asylum seekers deemed vulnerable are not prioritized. The new law establishes a secretariat in charge of unaccompanied minors under the Ministry for Migration and Asylum instead of under the National Center for Social Solidarity. The law sets tighter deadlines for issuing decisions on claims filed by asylum seekers in detention from 20 to 10 days. The law precipitates the process for the issuance of decisions after appeals were filed; unifies the registration process at the RICs and the Asylum Service into one step; and introduces sign language, as appropriate, as well as the official language of a country as an acceptable alternative to the language requested by applicants for interpretation.

If authorities decide to halt an asylum case, the applicant can, within nine months, either request that the process be restarted or file a new claim. In such cases, until there is a final decision, the asylum applicant cannot be deported or returned. Under the same law, if an appeal is rejected, applicants (except unaccompanied minors), must be detained at a predeparture center until they are returned. The filing of a subsequent application or a request for annulment of a decision does not automatically end the detention.

On January 3, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Citizen Protection issued a joint decree naming 12 countries of origin of asylum seekers that the government considers safe: Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Albania, Georgia, Ukraine, India, and Armenia. Applicants from “safe” countries of origin undergo a fast-track process for reviewing their asylum claim and are required to demonstrate why their country is not safe for their return.

Human rights activists and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community argued that the vast majority of asylum applicants from these countries were either persecuted due to their sexual orientation and gender identity or faced serious threats to their lives, many due to their LGBTI status. On July 7, the Greek NGO Diotima reported on a Moroccan female transgender asylum seeker whose application and appeal had been rejected and who faced deportation. Diotima asked that she be granted international protection, arguing that her life would be at risk due to her sexual orientation if she returned to Morocco. On

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October 14, the court accepted her claim, annulling the deportation order on the grounds that she would face arrest, imprisonment, and abuse if sent back to her country (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Discrimination and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Authorities did not always provide adequate security or physical protection to asylum seekers, particularly those residing in the overcrowded RICs.

Local and international media, human rights NGOs, and international organizations reported that asylum seekers personally testified that at the Greece-Turkey land border they were physically abused and deprived of their personal belongings, including their money and cell phones, prior to being returned to Turkey.

On March 4, a man was shot and killed while trying to cross the border from Turkey to Greece amid violent clashes at the Evros border (see section 2.f., Refoulement). Some NGOs reported he was shot by Greek security forces, likely by accident. On May 12, more than 100 members of the European Parliament addressed a letter to the head of the European Commission, calling for a formal investigation into the death. A government spokesman on March 10 “explicitly denied” that Greek security forces were involved in the incident.

The CPT reported receiving “credible allegations of migrants being pushed back across the Evros land border to Turkey.” The CPT also raised concerns over the Coast Guard preventing migrants’ boats from reaching the country’s islands or pushing back migrants who had arrived within the country’s territory.

In many instances, newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers on the islands, including pregnant women and children, stayed for days in the open air, without shelter, food, and other care, waiting to be temporarily transferred to a quarantine facility and processed for registration to the RICs. The separation and protection of vulnerable groups was not implemented at some sites due to overcrowding, lack of alternative housing, and restrictions in movement due to the pandemic.

NGOs, including Diotima, stated the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction measures employed at the RICs for most of the year resulted in more gender-based

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violence but with fewer of these incidents being reported. Refugee and migrant women who are victims of gender-based violence are legally eligible for temporary shelter in government-run homes and for legal and psychosocial assistance, but few reported abuse, according to aid organizations. Some NGO representatives reiterated findings from previous years that even after reporting rapes to the authorities, some victims continued residing in the same camp as the perpetrators.

Authorities recorded numerous other violent incidents, including clashes among residents of various nationalities occurring mostly in the RICs, often resulting in injuries and deaths. The RVRN recorded 51 incidents involving racially motivated verbal and physical violence against refugees and migrants in 2019 (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

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.

Several international media reported on allegations of pushbacks. A *New York Times* article on August 14 claimed the country illegally pushed back at least 1,072 asylum seekers and migrants who arrived in Greek territory, citing at least 31 incidents in which groups were sent back to Turkey. In a public statement on June 11, the IOM in Geneva expressed concern about “persistent reports of pushbacks and collective expulsions of migrants, in some cases violent, at the EU border between Greece and Turkey.” The IOM called on authorities to investigate the alleged incidents, for all states to avoid militarizing border patrols, and to continue “ensuring protection-sensitive border management, aligned with international law.” The following day, June 12, UNHCR issued a statement stating “the present allegations go against Greece’s international obligations and can expose people to grave danger.” Several respected media outlets published investigative reports between May and July saying security forces pushed refugees back into Turkey. The methods reportedly include disabling (sometimes by assailants covered head-to-toe in black) the engines of boats full of asylum seekers so the boats drift back to Turkey, putting the migrants on tent-like life rafts which have a motor but cannot be steered and were pointed toward Turkey, or simply towing the boats into

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Turkish waters and cutting the line.

The government stated border protection operations were carried out in cooperation with the European Union Agency Frontex. Prime Minister Mitsotakis publicly affirmed the country operated according to international law. On November 12, Frontex stated that a preliminary internal investigation found no evidence of direct or indirect involvement by Frontex or EU member-state officials in refugee pushbacks at the Greece-Turkey border. Media and NGO reports continued to allege that pushbacks were a standard practice. The Frontex Management Board agreed to organize a subgroup under its authority to carry out an investigation on the matter.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis and other government officials, including the ministers for migration and asylum, for citizen protection and for shipping affairs and island policy, denied any wrongdoing, affirmed the country's commitment to international law, and blamed the reports on Turkish disinformation campaigns. In public remarks on March 3, after border guards repelled attempts over several days by thousands of apparent refugees to cross the land border with Turkey at Evros, Mitsotakis said the issue was "no longer a refugee problem" and called Turkey a "safe country." He charged that Turkey was instead using "desperate people to promote its geopolitical agenda and to divert attention from the horrible situation in Syria. The tens of thousands of people who tried to enter Greece over the past few days did not come from Idlib. They have been living safely in Turkey for a long period of time; most of them speak Turkish fluently." Other officials similarly have argued that the country is protecting its borders in response to Turkish efforts designed to pressure the country and the EU. They described Turkey as a "safe country," meaning that returning asylum seekers to Turkey is not refoulement.

On March 31, the president of the Council of State agreed to temporarily halt the extradition of two Afghan women on vulnerability grounds. The applicants had filed a petition for the suspension of the order that temporarily barred asylum applications. The order would have forced their deportation without allowing them to seek protection through asylum. The president denied a similar request by a third Afghan female plaintiff.

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Access to Asylum: The law establishes procedures for granting 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 and Asylum. 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 IOM-assisted voluntary return programs. UNHCR assisted the government with briefings and the distribution of multilingual leaflets and information packages on asylum and asylum procedures.

The Asylum Service, including regional asylum offices and autonomous asylum units, suspended in-person services between March 13 and May 15 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, applications for international protection and appeals at second instance were not registered by the authorities and interviews were not conducted. With the exception of asylum applicants at the centers on Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros, and Kos, the government renewed for an additional six months asylum seekers' residence permits that would have expired between March 13 and May 31. The Asylum Service resumed operations on May 18, with many administrative procedures (such as changes to addresses, telephone numbers, personal data, the separation of files, the procurement of copies from the personal file, the rescheduling and the prioritization of hearings, the provision of legal aid etc.) able to be completed online.

Starting March 22, authorities restricted movement and generally did not allow visitors at the RICs and several reception facilities. In a July 4 ministerial decree, these measures were expanded to all reception facilities around the country. Residents were required to stay within the perimeter of the reception center, and movement outside the camps was permitted only from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., with no more than 150 residents allowed to exit every hour, and only in groups no larger than 10 persons. All visits or activities inside the RICs were banned unless they related to accommodation, food provision, or medical care, or were authorized by

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the management of the center or camp. Access to legal services was also subject to management authorization. Human rights groups criticized those restrictions as being more severe than those applied to the general population.

On May 19, human rights activists and NGOs working with asylum applicants, including Oxfam and the Greek Council for Refugees, expressed concerns about what they called “a practice by the authorities of issuing mass rejections,” arguing that the mass rejections undermined individuals’ right to a fair asylum procedure. In their statement both organizations estimated that only a fraction of those whose initial applications were rejected were able to access legal support granted by the state, due to restrictions in movement, the tight 10-day deadline for submitting an appeal, and the overall structural difficulties for navigating the highly complex asylum procedure. On April 27, the Greek Council for Refugees reported that in 2019 only 33 percent of the asylum seekers who had lodged an appeal at second instance had benefitted from free legal assistance. The Greek Council for Refugees called this “an administrative practice incompatible with the EU law,” albeit quasi-standardized and generalized.

Access to the asylum process for persons detained in predeparture centers remained a concern. According to the Asylum Information Database annual report, updated by the Greek Council for Refugees on June 23, the average processing time in 2019 for asylum applications exceeded 10 months. Out of 87,461 applications pending at the end of 2019, the personal interview had not yet taken place in 71,396 (approximately 82 percent) of them. For nearly 48,000 of the applications pending at the end of 2019, the interview was scheduled for the second half of 2020 or even after. Fast-track Syria Unit applicants received interview appointments for 2021, while applicants from Iraq and from African countries were scheduled to be interviewed in late 2023. Interview dates for applicants from Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan were set as far ahead as 2024.

In his annual report for 2019, the ombudsman confirmed, while sourcing the Asylum Service regional offices in Athens and in Thessaloniki, that the average waiting time for the examination of asylum applications by nationals with high recognition rates (from Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran) exceeded three years. On November 12, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum presented data indicating that

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the number of asylum decisions increased by 73 percent compared with 2019, and the number of pending asylum decisions decreased by 37 percent. According to the ministry, as of October 30, 82,646 initial decisions were pending and 4,976 more decisions were pending at the Appeals Authority.

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 EU-Turkey statement, every undocumented migrant crossing from Turkey to 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 section 2.d., Freedom of Movement). Citing the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 16 Turkey suspended all returns of rejected asylum applicants from the five island centers until further notice. From the beginning of the year until then, a total of 139 rejected asylum seekers were returned to Turkey.

Employment: Recognized refugees and holders of asylum-seeker papers were entitled to work, although this right was not widely publicized or consistently enforced. There were limited options for employment, made scarcer by the pandemic.

Access to Basic Services: Legally, services such as shelter, health care, education, and judicial procedures are granted to asylum seekers with a valid residency permit. However, asylum seekers had limited access to these services due to overcrowding in reception sites, overburdened hospitals and health units, restrictions in movement, and staffing gaps due to the pandemic.

Everyone in the country is entitled to emergency medical care, regardless of legal status. Medical volunteers, NGO-contracted doctors, the National Organization for Public Health, and army medical doctors provided basic health care in reception centers and referred emergencies and complex cases to local hospitals, which were often overburdened and understaffed. MSF was forced to close a medical clinic on Lesbos after protesters threw rocks at volunteers. Their press release noted a rise

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in “aggressive behavior towards asylum seekers and refugees, as well as humanitarian organizations and volunteers.”

Some individuals suffering from chronic diseases encountered problems obtaining proper medication. Asylum seekers lacking a permanent or provisional social security number faced particular difficulty in accessing medical, mental health, and pharmaceutical care, with those suffering from chronic diseases being left without treatment for a considerable amount of time.

On October 11, Migration and Asylum Minister Notis Mitarachis announced that asylum seekers would receive a bank account, taxpayer identification number, and social security number upon completing their initial registration, allowing asylum seekers to rent an apartment, get a job, and receive medical care.

Once granted asylum, new refugees were provided one month in subsidized housing. It remained difficult in that time span to receive documents required to apply for a job, rent a house, or receive the health booklet needed for some medical services. Passports to leave the country temporarily were easily obtainable.

The government operated facilities staffed with basic medical personnel outside the RICs and reception facilities in the mainland for the examination and isolation of possible COVID-19 cases. Media and NGOs, including MSF, reported funding gaps which delayed or disrupted the operation of these facilities. They also underscored the difficulty in practicing social distancing in congested environments that lacked washing facilities, antiseptics, and sufficient masks.

The government enforced a different protocol for the management of COVID-19 outbreaks in reception camps than for other enclosed population groups. The government protocol, known as the Agnodiki Plan, requires facilities to be quarantined and all cases (confirmed and suspected) to be isolated. If outbreaks occur at other enclosed population groups (such as nursing homes), vulnerable individuals are to be immediately moved from the site to safe accommodations, while all confirmed and suspected cases are isolated off-site in a separate facility.

RICs on islands and in the Evros region continued to be overcrowded despite intense government efforts to decongest them. Shelter, health care, wash facilities,

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and sewer connections were inadequate, often raising security and health concerns. Housing conditions at reception facilities elsewhere on the mainland were generally better, although at times overcrowding and remoteness from urban centers hindered access to services.

Many vulnerable asylum seekers were eligible to be sheltered in apartments via the ESTIA housing program implemented by UNHCR in cooperation with some NGOs and local municipalities. Conditions in the apartments were significantly better than in reception facilities. IOM implemented a program for sheltering asylum seekers in short-term facilities such as hotels. Throughout July media reported on several cases of recognized refugees staying in the streets after they had to leave EU- and government-sponsored accommodation. An unknown number of homeless refugees were temporarily accommodated in big tents at reception camps around Attica (Elaionas, Skaramangas, Schisto, Malakasa.)

Unaccompanied minors living in “protective custody” in police stations had limited or no access to health care or medical services. As of October 15, according to the country’s National Center for Social Solidarity, 176 unaccompanied children were in protective custody (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions, Physical Conditions). On November 18, the Ministry for Migration and Asylum reported that all 170 unaccompanied minors who had been in protective custody were transferred to suitable facilities.

Durable Solutions: Refugees may apply for naturalization after seven years of residence in the country as a recognized refugee per a change in the law that took effect March 11. The previous requirement was three years. The government processed 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, offering in some cases 2,000 euros (\$2,400) as an inducement.

Temporary Protection: As of February 29, the government provided temporary protection to approximately 599 individuals who may not qualify as refugees.

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Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2019 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 then prime minister Alexis Tsipras.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit the participation of women or members of minority groups 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, following an August reshuffle, six out of 51 (approximately 11 percent) ministers and deputy ministers were women. Legislation passed in 2019 requires a minimum of 40 percent distribution of male and female candidates in local, regional, national, and European Parliament elections. During the year women held 22 percent of elected seats in the national legislature.

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 3, media reported that police dismantled two criminal gangs operating in Athens and in northern Greece that engaged in extortion for money, arson attacks, and drug and weapons trafficking. In both cases, police officers covered up for the

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criminal rings' actions.

In August 2019 parliament passed legislation establishing a unified transparency authority by transferring the powers and responsibilities of public administration inspection services to an independent authority.

In November 2019 laws addressing passive and active bribery of officials were amended to contain a specific definition of "public official" and to make active bribery of a public official into a felony, instead of a misdemeanor, punishable by a prison sentence of five to eight year (as opposed to three).

Corruption: Reports of official corruption continued. On February 26, a Greek-Israeli businessman testified to a parliamentary committee investigating potential abuse of authority by the former alternate justice minister under the Syriza government, Dimitris Papangelopoulos, in a case involving bribes by the Novartis pharmaceutical company. The businessman alleged that in 2016 Papangelopoulos had asked him for money (350,000 euros or \$420,000) in the presence of another member of the government at the time, in exchange for "clearing" tax evasion-related cases the businessman faced in court. According to the testimony, the money would be used to pay the trial expenses of a newspaper owner sued by the businessman for slander. The businessman claimed several times during the year, that politicians, journalists, and judicial officials had formed a para-state mechanism to extort money from business leaders or hurt their political adversaries.

On October 27, a criminal appeals court found former defense minister Akis Tsochatzopoulos, his wife, and his cousin guilty of money laundering with regard to a Swiss health insurance contract paid with bribe money. All three defendants received suspended sentences of six years in prison and a 100,000-euro fine (\$120,000). They were set free on bail and with a travel ban. Tsochatzopoulos had previously been sentenced and served time in prison on money laundering and other charges in relation to defense procurements.

The government continued efforts to combat tax evasion by increasing inspections and crosschecks among various authorities and by using more sophisticated methods to find undeclared income. Authorities had monthly lotteries offering

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taxpayers rewards of 1,000 euros (\$1,200) for using credit or debit cards, considered more financially transparent, in their daily transactions. Media reported allegations of tax officials complicit in individual and corporate tax evasion. In May the country's National Transparency Authority launched investigations of NGOs providing support to asylum seekers and migrants, seeking examples of financial mismanagement. No findings had been publicized by the end of the year.

On November 17, the government established the Financial Prosecutor's Office to deal with financial crime in the wake of public complaints about an investigation by the Corruption Prosecutor's Office into a case involving the pharmaceutical company Novartis. The new office, headed by a senior prosecutor selected by the Supreme Judicial Council of the Supreme Court, included 16 prosecutors and became operational in November.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires income and asset disclosure by appointed and elected officials, including private-sector employees such as journalists and the leaders of government-funded NGOs. Several agencies are required 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 some delay. 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 (\$12,000 to \$1.2 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. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views. COVID-19 restrictions, however, impeded access to reception and detention facilities for migrants on the islands and--in certain circumstances--to official camps on the mainland.

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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 2019 annual report, the office reported receiving 16,976 complaints, of which 73 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.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under a law that took effect in 2019, rape, including spousal rape, is a crime punishable by 10 years' up 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.

In 2019 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). On May 5, media reported statistics from the Secretariat General for Family Planning and Gender Equality indicating an increase in violent incidents, including domestic violence, during the general lockdown in March and in April for COVID-19. The secretariat's hotline received 1,070 calls reporting violent incidents in April, of which 648 referred to domestic violence, compared with 325 and 166, respectively, in March. Seven out of 10 incidents were reported by the victims themselves, mostly spouses and life partners (61 percent), children (10 percent),

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ex-spouses and former life partners (8 percent), and parents and siblings (9 percent). The data prompted the secretariat to conduct a wide campaign, involving television, internet and radio spots, to inform victims of domestic violence about their available options to escape from abusive behavior. Experts from the secretariat's counselling services noted in parliament during September sessions of the special interparliamentary committee on gender equality that victims were reluctant to file complaints during the lockdown but after restrictions were lifted, complaints tripled and sometimes quadrupled.

On November 25, a survey ordered by the Ministry of Citizen Protection and its official think tank, the Center for Security Research, showed that more than three out of 10 women were abused during the spring lockdown. The survey, conducted from July to October, collected responses from 750 women. Of respondents, 36 percent reported suffering an abuse, with most of the victims being women ages 38 to 39, married, and with an average of two children. Eight in 10 of the perpetrators were men with a median age of 45, and four in 10 were college graduates, worked at full-time jobs, and had no history of violence.

Penalties for domestic violence 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 reached the courtroom, noting that despite an adequate legislative framework, judges' personal biases and social norms that blame the victim were major obstacles. In 2019 police recorded 229 reported rape incidents, 62 of which were attempted rapes. Police reported identifying the perpetrators in 161 cases of rape and attempted rape. The number of identified perpetrators was 227.

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

Two popular television hosts were suspended for five days and fined 150,000 euros

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(\$180,000) in January for comments they made in November 2019 making light of an incident in which a woman said a man sexually assaulted her in a public space at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.

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 anecdotal reports that migrant and refugee women residing in the country underwent FGM/C prior to their arrival in Greece, there was no evidence FGM/C was practiced in the country. In 2019 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, enforced since 2019, 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. On November 24, NGO ActionAid reported that 85 percent of women in Greece were subjected to sexual harassment. The research took place from July to September based on a sample of 1,001 women from across the country and an additional 376 women working in tourism and catering. Based on the same research, only 6 percent officially denounced these incidents. In his 2019 annual report, the ombudsman reported his office received 335 complaints pertinent to gender equality, without specifying how many were related to sexual harassment, noting, however, that complaints on gender equality grounds were among the highest in numbers for calendar year 2019 (335 of 16,976). This trend was also reflected in the ombudsman's special report on nondiscrimination and equal treatment for 2019. Of the 1,176 complaints received in 2019, 44 percent cited discrimination on gender equality grounds. In these reports, as well as in previous years, the ombudsman noted the absence of a policy against sexual harassment in most private and public workplaces, oftentimes combined with inadequate investigation of reported incidents.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the

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number, spacing, and timing of their children, and to manage their reproductive health with access to the information and the means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Some pregnant women and new mothers, particularly those residing in the five reception and identification centers for asylum seekers on the North Aegean islands during the COVID-19 pandemic, reportedly faced obstacles in accessing proper health care. There were no legal, social, and cultural barriers to access to contraceptives. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

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 sector. Muslim minority persons in Thrace can request the use of sharia with notarized consent of both parties (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups).

Legislation passed in 2019 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.

A widespread perception still exists among private businesses that a pregnant employee is a burden, according to the 2019 annual antidiscrimination report from the ombudsman.

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 delayed birth registration but imposes a fine in such cases. On February 3, the government passed legislation allowing the birth registration process to be completed electronically to increase transparency and facilitate the cross-checking of documents and data.

Child Abuse: Violence against children, particularly migrant, refugee, street, and

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Romani children, remained a problem. From January through October, the NGO Smile of the Child reported 1,019 serious cases of abuse related to 1,813 children through its helpline SOS 1056. 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.

Child, 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 often marrying between the ages of 15 and 20.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age of consent is 15. The law criminalizes sex with children younger than 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. In 2019 police arrested 27 individuals on child pornography charges.

Displaced Children: According to National Center for Social Solidarity data, approximately 4,190 refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children resided in the country as of October 15. Only 2,659 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. In 2019 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.

On May 12, the government passed legislation establishing the Special Secretariat

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for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, later assigned to work under the Ministry for Migration and Asylum. The new law assigns the overall management and supervision of unaccompanied minors to this body, removing responsibility from the National Center for Social Solidarity, although the center continued to issue biweekly statistics on the status of unaccompanied minors.

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors is responsible for sheltering unaccompanied minors, including prioritizing cases with vulnerable or disabled minors. It is also responsible for coordinating the short-term and long-term placement of unaccompanied minors in shelters (government and nongovernmental) and safe zones in the RICs and other facilities. The secretariat is entrusted with: maintaining the national electronic registry for unaccompanied minors; monitoring the enforcement of standard operating procedures at reception facilities; periodically assessing the services provided; training and supporting the staff at these facilities, and coordinating efforts to relocate minors to other countries.

The government, through the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, increased placements for housing unaccompanied minors and sped up the process for relocating approximately 1,000 of them to other European countries as part of a voluntary relocation scheme.

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). On September 29, Secretary General for Unaccompanied Minors Irini Agapidaki stated on social media that there were no unaccompanied minors residing at the RICs on the five Aegean islands or in Evros. The unaccompanied minors had all been relocated to other shelters or to other EU member states. On November 18, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum reported that all unaccompanied minors who were in protective custody as of November 14 had been transferred to proper accommodation facilities.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the

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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>.

Anti-Semitism

Local Jewish leaders estimated the Jewish population 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. There were several incidents of graffiti and vandalism.

On January 3, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) condemned anti-Semitic graffiti on a recently restored historic synagogue in Trikala, central Greece. The vandalism took place in late December 2019, with unknown perpetrators painting swastikas on the walls surrounding the synagogue and writing anti-Semitic slogans such as “Jewish snakes out.” The KIS called on the authorities to arrest those responsible. The city of Trikala also issued a statement condemning the incident. On August 13, a memorial to fallen Greek Air Force personnel in central Athens was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti reading ‘Satanic Jews Out’ interspersed with Christian symbols.

On October 5, media reported that unknown perpetrators sprayed anti-Semitic slogans in German on the exterior walls of the Athens Jewish Cemetery. The municipality of Athens promptly acted to clean the walls, according to a statement by the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, denouncing the incident. The government spokesperson said authorities would do everything possible to arrest the perpetrators. Several prominent government officials, including Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Niki Kerameus, tweeted that the incident was shameful.

On October 16, unknown perpetrators defaced the Holocaust Museum of Thessaloniki by spray-painting on the facade “With Jews, you lose.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Hellenic Solution party denounced the attack at the Holocaust Monument. The KIS on October 19 issued a statement condemning other attacks, including the vandalism of four tombstones at the Jewish cemetery of Rhodes and graffiti at the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki reading “Death to

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Israel.” The KIS statement said the “vandalism of cemeteries and monuments equals tolerating the vandalism of memory and civilization” while urging the Ministry of Citizen Protection to arrest the perpetrators and to reinforce security measures on all Jewish institutions and monuments in Greece.

A perpetrator or perpetrators spray-painted a Christogram cross with the words “Jesus Christ Conquers” on the facade of a synagogue and Holocaust monument on December 3 in Larissa, central Greece, and on December 29 on a Holocaust monument in Drama, northern Greece, also damaging the marble base of the monument. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the diocese of Larisa and Tyrnavos, the Secretary General for Religious Affairs, and the respective municipalities all issued statements denouncing the acts. The KIS praised the municipality of Drama for immediately restoring the damage and erasing the graffiti. On December 4, Larissa police arrested a male suspect in the nearby area of Tempi, charging him with damaging property and violating an antiracism law during the December 3 incident.

The KIS continued to express concern about anti-Semitic comments by some in the media. On January 29, the KIS expressed concern about political cartoons and images in which political controversies were mocked with the use of Jewish sacred symbols and Holocaust comparisons. The KIS issued a statement protesting a sketch of the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp in a political cartoon arguing against lifting protection of primary residencies from foreclosures. The KIS called the cartoon unacceptable because it trivialized a symbol of horror. The newspaper called the reaction “justifiable,” arguing it had no intent to trivialize or deny the Holocaust.

On November 11, the KIS denounced a front-page headline of the newspaper *Makeleio* related to the announcement by the Jewish CEO of a pharmaceutical company about the COVID-19 vaccine. The headline presented the company’s CEO as the infamous Nazi official Dr. Joseph Mengele, also known as the butcher of the Auschwitz concentration camp, with the title: “Jewish veterinarian will stick the needle in us! Nightmarish admissions by force in ‘chamber-camps’ as flocks.” The KIS noted that the parallel between Nazi experiments in the concentration camps and the vaccine’s production perpetuates hatred and stereotypes against

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Jews, while also discouraging individuals from using the vaccine. On November 20, Secretary General for Religious Affairs George Kalantzis issued a statement condemning the newspaper's characterization, saying that such reporting is reminiscent of the Middle Ages "when Jews were accused of every disaster, illness, or defeat."

On October 22, a court of appeals in Athens decided to imprison seven leading members of the ultra-nationalist and pro-Nazi Golden Dawn party after the court had proclaimed Golden Dawn a criminal gang on October 7. All were sentenced to 13 years in prison but one of them, Christos Pappas, evaded arrest and at the end of the year remained at large. Local and international Jewish communities expressed concern over the anti-Semitic rhetoric of many Golden Dawn members.

On January 27, Prime Minister Mitsotakis attended memorial events marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and became the first prime minister to pay an official visit to the former concentration camp.

On January 9, during a visit by Prime Minister Mitsotakis to Washington, the Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) signed an agreement allowing researchers to examine records of Nazi atrocities in Greece between 1940 and 1945. The Ministry of Culture was cooperating with USHMM on a joint effort to retrieve personal items belonging to Jewish refugees from the 1946 shipwreck of the *Athina* off Astypalea Island; the items were for inclusion in the USHMM's permanent exhibition.

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

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disability rights reported government enforcement of these provisions was inconsistent. For example, an employee with multiple sclerosis lost her job after returning from six months of sick leave required for therapy, even though she submitted a doctor's note stating the therapy was needed, according to the ombudsman in the 2019 annual report. The employer cited "unconventional behavior" as reason for the dismissal three months after the employee's return. Authorities fined the employer for not making the necessary adaptations to accommodate the employee's disability.

On May 9, police in Gastouni, Peloponnese, physically attacked a young student with a mental disability, reportedly assuming he was a thief. The incident, which took place just outside the victim's residence, prompted reactions by human rights activists including the Racist Crimes Watch Network and the National Confederation of Disabled People (see section 1.c., Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

Most children with disabilities had the option to attend mainstream or specialized schools. The dropout rate for students with disabilities was high, partly due to shortages in transportation, a lack of infrastructure such as ramps and audiovisual aids, and staff and funding shortages. Despite progress in establishing new school units and classes to help students with disabilities integrate in primary and secondary education, the ombudsman and other agencies noted that integrating children with disabilities 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 accessible public transportation vehicles were among the biggest access concerns. Even ramps in the street were often too steep or rough to use, and ramps for public transportation were often out of order. In July a long-awaited ministerial decree established technical guidelines, requiring existing buildings and facilities to have made "reasonable adaptations" to ensure accessibility by the year's end, or else lose their license.

In his 2019 annual report, the ombudsman reported that 37 percent of the complaints his office received related to disability and chronic disease, a notable increase from 2018.

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On March 11, the government abolished legislation passed in May 2019 lifting significant obstacles to the granting of Greek citizenship for persons with intellectual disabilities or psychiatric illnesses. The previous legislation enabled such persons to claim Greek nationality if they were born or raised in the country by lawfully residing foreign nationals, allowing them to bypass the mandatory requirement of several years of Greek schooling or the passage of a Greek language and civilization test. The National Confederation of Disabled People denounced the government's decision in a joint statement with the NGOs Hellenic League for Human Rights and Generation 2.0. for Rights, Equality and Diversity. On October 12, the government amended the citizenship law, providing for a unified system of written exams in Greek language and culture for all applicants, except those older than 62, those with a certified disability, and those with learning difficulties. The exempted group could take an oral test.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis presented the country's first National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities on December 16, which sets clear and measurable targets based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The action plan establishes a coordinating government mechanism of central and local authorities to follow up on implementation, and a National Authority for Accessibility to monitor the implementation of legislation.

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

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

On May 18, a citizen residing in Heraklion, Crete, reported local police physically abused him as he headed home from work, assuming he was a migrant. According to the victim's complaint, police told him to stop for an inspection, saying, "Hey Pakistani, pull aside." He reported that police then punched, kicked, and threatened him with retaliation if he filed a complaint. On May 20, police announced the launch of an investigation into the incident. No outcome of this investigation had been made public by the year's end.

On June 6, the NGO Movement United against Racism and the Fascist Threat

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denounced police attacks on individuals before or during their detention.

According to the NGO, 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.

On December 26, according to media sources, a group of about 10 men armed with sticks, knives, and iron bars shouted racist slogans and attempted to enter a shelter for unaccompanied minors in Oreokastro, northern Greece, operated by the Church of Greece for refugee children between the ages of eight and 15. Four minors who were attacked in the yard of the facility were transferred to a hospital for treatment. One of them experienced severe respiratory problems after being beaten on the chest. Numerous political parties condemned the attack, and a lawyer representing the facility filed a formal complaint. On December 27, police arrested two persons, a 38-year-old father and his 13-year-old son, for participating in the attack. At the end of the year, the investigation was ongoing.

On October 14, media reported that a court in Athens ruled in favor of 47 female migrant cleaning workers whose contracts with the municipality of Athens were terminated because they could not certify knowledge of the Greek language, as per a new Ministry of Interior regulation. The court said all 47 women should be given their jobs back.

Although the government recognizes 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. Some 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. Individuals may legally call themselves Turks, and associations using those terms were able to function regularly without legal status (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association). Government officials and courts have denied requests by Slavic groups to use the term Macedonian to identify themselves on the grounds that more than two million ethnically (and

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linguistically) Greek citizens also used the term Macedonian for self-identification.

The law recognizes a Muslim religious 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. These persons can be in 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 2019-20 school year, the government operated 115 primary schools and two secondary schools in the Thrace region that provided secondary bilingual education in Greek and Turkish for minority children. 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, and claimed the government ignored their request to privately establish an additional minority secondary school. The same representatives noted a decreasing number of primary-level minority schools, which the government attributed to a decreasing number of students. Per the law, any facility with fewer than nine students must temporarily suspend operations, with students referred to neighboring schools. For the 2019-20 school year, authorities announced that 20 schools had suspended operations in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, five of which were minority schools. On April 28, an additional two minority schools suspended operation for the school period 2020-21 as per a ministerial decision, due to low attendance.

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. The ombudsman wrote in his 2019 annual report that local authorities did not help to improve the living and social conditions of the Roma, which would gradually assist them to integrate. The lack of integration led to more complaints of tension between Roma and non-Roma. The ombudsman praised local governments that implemented integration practices.

On July 7, the NGO Racist Crimes Watch filed a complaint with police, claiming that police on motorcycles had beaten two Roma in the Athens suburb of Vrilissia

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because police falsely believed the Roma had conducted a robbery in the area on June 28. The NGO argued that police engaged in ethnic profiling.

Poor school attendance, illiteracy, and high dropout rates among Romani children were 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.

On March 11, the government abolished legislation allowing Roma born in Greece to parents without official registration to gain Greek citizenship.

On July 10, the European Court of Human Rights accepted the request for interim measures in the case of Romani tent-dwellers residing in Aspropyrgos, in greater Athens, who were to be evicted by the local municipality. The court suspended the eviction until July 27 and asked Greek authorities to provide timely information about the legal grounds of their case, including eviction protocols and alternative housing solutions. On July 6, the UN Human Rights Committee, following a petition by the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor, suspended the eviction of seven other Romani individuals, also residents of Aspropyrgos, until their appeal of the eviction could be heard.

On March 11, a Thessaloniki court blocked the enforcement of a board decision by the municipality of Thermaikos, in northern Greece, to evict approximately 200 Roma families residing in makeshift homes in an area called Tsairia. The court deemed that the municipality did not offer an alternative site for relocation. The local mayor, George Tsamaslis, vowed to appeal the decision, arguing that finding “a new home” for the Roma was not among the city’s responsibilities.

Local media and NGOs reported race- and hate-motivated attacks on migrants, allegedly by far-right individuals acting alone or in groups. In its annual report for 2019, the RVRN reported that, despite a decrease in incidents of organized violence since 2013, “a significant number of the attacks showed signs of a structured organization or organized group.” More than 50 percent of the incidents recorded by the RVRN in 2019 (51 of 100) targeted migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, or skin color. The RVRN also noted “aggression against refugees in other aspects of daily life” as well as “a wider

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targeting of people of African origin, compared to previous years.”

On October 7, Greek courts determined the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party had operated as a criminal organization that systematically targeted members of ethnic and religious minorities, including Muslim and Jewish persons, with hate speech and violence. The court found 18 former members of parliament guilty of participating in a criminal enterprise, and found 16 members guilty of the 2013 murder of anti-Fascist activist Pavlos Fyssas. The historic decision ended a trial which lasted more than five years, the longest in Greek history, and resulted in prison sentences of 13 years for seven leading figures of the group.

On July 2, an Athens court found Panayotis Papagiannis, a leading member of the Krypteia Fascist and nationalist group, guilty of a number of racist attacks, including arson at the headquarters of the Afghan community in Athens, and sentenced him to a five-year prison term.

In July the coordinator for refugee education at the Malakasa camp, Konstantinos Kalemis, made racist comments on social media regarding Giannis Antetokounmpo, a Greek player in the National Basketball Association. Kalemis commented on an interview in which Antetokounmpo said growing up in Greece was difficult because of the racial divide and because he constantly feared his parents would be deported. Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Niki Kerameus removed Kalemis from his post on July 24, noting that “such insulting and racist behavior has no place in the Greek educational system.”

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, 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, including LGBTI refugees and migrants,

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remained a problem. Societal discrimination and harassment of LGBTI persons were widespread despite advances in the legal framework protecting such individuals. 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. A male police officer harassed and verbally abused a transgender woman during a routine inspection at an entertainment venue, the NGO Greek Transgender Support Association (SYD) reported on January 7. The woman said the police officer used insulting, derogatory, and sexist language, touched her inappropriately, and insisted on bodily searching her himself. The victim filed a complaint against the police officer. No trial date has been set.

In 2019 the RVRN recorded 16 attacks based on sexual orientation and 25 based on gender identity. The sexual orientation attacks included verbal and physical assaults. In three cases, the victims were minors. The gender identity attacks included two cases of rape, one of which involved a minor, two incidents of sexual abuse and sexual assault, two incidents of physical violence, and 17 cases of verbal insults or threats. The RVRN noted the recorded incidents showed that “transgender people suffer verbal abuse, almost daily, which escalates as their transition progresses and becomes more visible.” According to information communicated to the RVRN for 2019, police recorded 282 incidents potentially involving racist motives, 32 of which were related to sexual orientation (20) and gender identity (12).

On May 14, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019 survey on LGBTI persons in the EU reported that in the country: 74 percent of respondents stated that they often or always avoided holding hands with their same-sex partner, 32 percent felt discriminated against at work, and 33 percent alleged they were harassed in the year before the survey. In addition, 51 percent of respondents felt discriminated against in at least one area of life in the year before the survey and 43 percent of LGBTI students aged 15 to 17 admitted hiding being LGBTI at school. Finally, 57 percent reported that LGBTI prejudice and intolerance has dropped during the past five years.

Activists in the LGBTI community said they faced particular hardships during the

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COVID-19 pandemic because they were forced to spend long periods at home with families who were not always accepting of their lifestyle, with an increase in domestic violence. Transgender individuals working in the sex industry also reported a loss of income during the pandemic.

On January 3, a joint ministerial decree outlined 12 countries of origin of asylum seekers the government considered “safe.” The decree raised concerns among human rights activists and the LGBTI community that the vast majority of these countries either persecuted individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity or presented serious threats to the lives of LGBTI individuals and human rights and LGBTI activists in the country (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

On July 7, the NGO Diotima reported on a Moroccan transgender person whose application for asylum was rejected. Diotima argued that if she returned to Morocco, the woman’s life would be at risk due to her gender identity, a claim accepted by the court on October 14. The court annulled the deportation decision on the grounds the woman would face arrest, imprisonment, and abuse if sent back to her country (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees).

Unmarried transgender individuals older than 15 may update documents to reflect their gender identity without undergoing sex reassignment surgery, according to Greek law. A judge must validate the change based on the individual’s external appearance. According to the Greek Transgender Support Association, the hearing process does not always have the necessary privacy and dignity for the applicant.

In his annual 2019 report, the ombudsman highlighted administrative obstacles faced by LGBTI individuals when they officially register a civil partnership. The ombudsman noted that corrections and changes to gender identity registrations, as part of administrative processes or notarial acts, did not always have the necessary safeguards of secrecy and respect for those impacted.

On January 20, a misdemeanors council ruled that six persons, including two store owners and four police officers, should be charged with fatal bodily harm in connection with the death of LGBTI activist Zak Kostopoulos in September 2018 in central Athens. The date of the trial was initially set for October 21 but due to restrictive COVID-19 measures, it was postponed indefinitely.

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HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

While the law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment of individuals with HIV, societal discrimination against persons with HIV or AIDS remained a problem. Persons with HIV or AIDS were exempt on medical grounds from serving in the armed forces. 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 January 28, the NGO Positive Voice reported on a patient who was hospitalized in isolation from other inmates solely because he had HIV. Hospital personnel moved him from his original room--which he shared with other patients--and announced he would have to use a separate bathroom from others, as well as disposable plates, cups, and cutlery. Hospital personnel did not respect the patient's privacy and dignity, the NGO said. In a public statement, the NGO noted instances in which HIV is used as a pretext by medical staff to delay or deny the provision of medical services.

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 labor 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 restricts labor arbitration mechanisms. The law 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.

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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 also requires at least half of the members of a first-level union to endorse a strike for it to be held. The law mandates minimum staff levels during strikes affecting public services.

The law gives authorities the right to commandeer services in national emergencies through civil mobilization orders. Anyone receiving a civil mobilization order is obliged to comply or face a prison sentence of at least three months. The law exempts individuals with a documented physical or mental disability from civil mobilization. The law explicitly prohibits the issuance of civil mobilization orders as a means of countering strike actions before or after their proclamation.

The government 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 commensurate to those of other laws related to civil rights. 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 reports of antiunion discrimination. For example, on February 21, the Workers Union in Publications, Bookstores, Photocopy Centers, Stationery, and Digital Devices of Athens protested the dismissal of the union's vice president, calling it "revengeful." The dismissal was "connected to his trade union activities and his participation in strikes," the union said. The employer reportedly cited low productivity as the reason, but the union noted the vice president had a strong seven-year track record at the business.

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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. 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 (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 commensurate to those of other serious crimes, but victims seldom reported violations.

On January 28, the General Confederation of Greek Workers, the biggest umbrella organization for workers' rights, condemned the "attempted murder" of an agriculture worker in Marathonas, Athens, by his employer. The incident occurred on January 27 when the employer shot a rifle at his employee for reportedly requesting unpaid wages.

Agricultural workers at Manolada in Ilia, Peloponnese, reported on April 1 that they had to live in makeshift huts for 10 to 20 persons, that were covered with layers of nylon, without running water, and had showers and toilets placed outside, according to the Manolada Watch initiative launched by the NGO Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity, to monitor the living and working conditions of migrants workers.

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

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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 in 2019, is responsible for enforcing child labor laws, with penalties for violators ranging from fines to imprisonment. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other serious crimes. Trade unions, however, alleged that enforcement was inadequate due to the inspectorate's understaffing and that the government did not adequately enforce the law to protect exploited children.

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 were indigenous Roma, Bulgarian, Romanian, or Albanian Roma. The pandemic caused fewer street children in Thessaloniki to "work," the NGO ARSIS reported on June 12. For example, ARSIS estimated that approximately 50 children were working in the streets from January to April, as opposed to 189 children during the same period in 2019. 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.

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 or AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status.

The government did not always effectively enforce these laws and regulations. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other laws related to denials of civil rights. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, sex (including pregnancy), disability, HIV status, social status, age, sexual

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orientation, and gender identity occurred.

In his 2019 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, sex, religion, and HIV status. The ombudsman reported on the case of a Muslim female student, practicing to becoming a nurse, who was prohibited by her superior at a public hospital from wearing a headscarf at work. The ombudsman reported that as of the end of the year the case remained open and was still under investigation. A study by ActionAid released November 24 showed that 85 percent of more than 1,300 women surveyed said they had been subjected to sexual harassment (see section 6, Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

By ministerial decree the government sets the national minimum salary for employees in the private sector and for unspecialized workers. These wages were above the poverty income level.

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 effectively enforced in all sectors, particularly in tourism, catering services, retail businesses, agriculture, the informal economy, or for domestic or migrant workers.

In 2019 the government passed new laws making it easier to terminate an employee, abolishing provisions that a contractor or subcontractor had to provide suitable reasons for the legal termination of an employee's contract. In 2019 the

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parliament passed legislation increasing the minimum hourly wage of part-time workers by 12 percent for every additional hour worked above a four-hour ceiling. Under the same legislation, the first five hours worked after a 40-hour work week are no longer considered overtime. Employers were required in such cases, however, to pay an additional 20 percent of the hourly wage.

The government did not always enforce wage and overtime laws effectively. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other similar violations. Unions and media alleged some private businesses forced their employees to return in cash part of their wages and mandatory seasonal bonuses after depositing them in the bank. Unions and media also alleged that some employers forced employees to unlawfully work while their contracts were temporarily suspended due to the pandemic during the time they were receiving subsidy allowances by the state instead of their salaries. Sometimes employees were officially registered as part-time employees but 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. Such violations were noted mostly in the tourism, agriculture, and housekeeping sectors. On February 18, media reported that a misdemeanors court in Kalamata, Peloponnese, sentenced to eight months in prison an employer who threatened his employees with dismissal if they did not return the full amount of seasonal bonuses in cash after it was deposited to their bank accounts.

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 standards could face temporary closure of their businesses. Under the same law, employers are obliged to declare in advance their employees' overtime work or changes in their work schedules. The legislation provides for social and welfare benefits to be granted to surrogate mothers, including protection from dismissal during pregnancy and after childbirth. Courts are required to examine complaints filed by employees against their employers for delayed

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payment within two months of 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 2019 presidential decree, the Labor Inspectorate and the General Directorate for Labor Relations, Health, Safety and Inclusion at Work were both brought under the General Secretariat for Labor. The directorate is the principal authority overseeing labor conditions in both the 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. Penalties for violations were commensurate to those of similar crimes, but the number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Inspectors have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

Authorities can temporarily close businesses that hire undeclared employees, and can permanently close businesses that repeatedly violate the law. Nonetheless, trade unions and media reiterated that enforcement of labor standards was inadequate in the shipping, tourism, and agriculture sectors. Enforcement was also lacking among enterprises employing 10 or fewer persons.

At least 15 workers were injured or killed as a result of work accidents, according to media reports. There was one major industrial accident which resulted in the injury of four workers on February 3. In November 2019 an Athens first instance court ruled that work-related stress falls into hazardous working conditions, vindicating the spouse and the son of a business employee who suffered a stroke due to work-related stress and lost his life. The court ordered compensation of 160,000 euros (\$192,000) for both complainants to be paid by the employer.