



Greece

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) won the majority of parliamentary seats for a second consecutive term in free and fair parliamentary elections held in 2000. Its leader, Constantine Simitis, has been Prime Minister since 1996. The judiciary is independent.

The national police and security services are responsible for internal security. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of all security forces. The police and security services were subject to a broad variety of restraints. Some members of the police and security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country had a market economy with a large public sector and a population of 11 million, which enjoyed a high standard of living. Economic growth was estimated at 4 percent and inflation at 3.5 percent for the year.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Border police killed one immigrant. Security forces personnel sometimes abused persons, particularly illegal immigrants and Roma. There were reports of police torture of illegal immigrants. Overcrowding and harsh conditions continued in some prisons. Police sweeps resulted in the detention of undocumented immigrants under often squalid conditions. There were legal limits on the freedom of association of ethnic minorities. Some leaders of minority religions reported difficulty with the authorities, but others noted a general improvement in government tolerance. Laws that restricted freedom of speech remained in force, and some legal restrictions and administrative obstacles on freedom of religion persisted. Violence and discrimination against women were problems. Discrimination against ethnic minorities and Roma remained a problem. There were reports that foreign children were forced into begging. Trafficking in women and children was a problem.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary and Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no political killings; however, in September, border police shot and killed an Albanian who was trying to cross illegally into the country. The policeman was charged with homicide.

On November 24, the Second Misdemeanors Court of Athens acquitted police officer Ioannis Rizopoulos in the 2001 shooting death of a 20-year old Albanian immigrant, Gentjan Celniku, while he was handcuffed and in police custody.

By year's end, the police had not taken action on an internal police council's recommendation that the officer responsible for the 2001 shooting death of Rom Marinos Christopoulous be dismissed from the police force.

Three migrants died during the year in poorly marked minefields on the Turkish border.

In December, 15 members of the terrorist group November 17 were convicted of various crimes including homicide; the leader of the group and several key operatives were given multiple life sentences.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The Constitution and law prohibit such practices; however, security forces occasionally abused persons, particularly illegal immigrants and Roma (see Section 5).

In September, human rights groups alleged that border police tortured three migrants attempting to return to Albania; authorities had taken no action on the case at year's end.

Two high school students in Kalamata alleged that, in July, police beat them during a routine identity check. Their parents filed lawsuits against three police officers, and the police director of Messinia ordered an investigation. There were no developments in either civil suit or the police investigation by year's end. In July, two Britons alleged that police beat them with batons after their arrest for attacking a shopkeeper and said they planned to sue the police for brutality.

Police abused Roma more frequently than some other groups. There were frequent police raids on Roma settlements and harsh police treatment of Roma in the Aspropyrgos settlement. Authorities did not take action in the January 2002 case of a police officer allegedly kicking a pregnant woman, who later miscarried, during a raid on the Aspropyrgos Roma camp.

There were no developments during the year in the Ministry of Public Order investigations into the alleged June 2002 police torture of Nigerian national Joseph Okeke or the alleged August 2002 beating and torture of Yannis Papacostas in a police station near Athens.

Authorities took no action during the year in the alleged 2001 beating and mistreatment of Rom Andreas Kalamiotis while in police custody in Aghia Parakevi or the alleged 2001 police beating of a Rom during a traffic stop in Nafplio.

Immigrants--mostly Albanian citizens--accused police of physical, verbal, and other mistreatment, and the confiscation and destruction of personal documents, particularly during police sweeps to apprehend illegal immigrants (see Section 2.d.).

In June, an Ombudsman's report on police abuse found that police took citizens to detention centers for arbitrary identity checks, used insulting language and threats of force, and conducted bodily searches in public. Most citizens were released within hours of being detained for identity checks.

Numerous anarchist and extremist groups attacked a wide spectrum of targets, mostly commercial property, during the year. There were occasional firebomb attacks on vehicles and commercial offices during the year.

Conditions in some prisons remained harsh due to overcrowding and outdated facilities. As of September, the Ministry of Justice reported that the total prison population was 8,555, while the total capacity of the prison system was 5,584. In general, juveniles were held separately from adults, and women were held separately from men. Pretrial detainees were held with convicted prisoners awaiting trials in Korydallos Prison. Female illegal aliens were held under poor conditions at the Drapetsona detention centers. Construction continued on four new prisons.

The Government permitted prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and some other independent human rights monitors, and several took place during the year; however, it did not consistently allow visits to police detention centers.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, throughout the year, the police conducted large-scale sweeps and temporarily detained, often under squalid conditions, large numbers of foreigners while determining their residence status (see Section 2.d.). Some of the foreigners were detained indefinitely without judicial review.

All police forces are under the authority of the Ministry of Public Order. During the year, the Bureau of Internal Affairs of the Ministry of Public Order took several disciplinary measures, including dismissal and suspension, against officers involved in corruption, primarily for forging documents and taking bribes. From January to August, 344 complaints were filed with the Bureau. Most cases involved violation of duty, false certificates, abuse of power,

corruption, violations with arms and explosives, illegal release of persons in police custody, pimping, and various violations relating to alien registration. By the end of August, the Bureau filed lawsuits in 135 cases against 78 policemen and 11 civil servants.

In June, the press and the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Helsinki Monitor alleged that penalties for corrupt or abusive police were too weak and discouraged citizens from pressing charges against police. NGOs also cited the November acquittal of a police officer in the 2001 killing of an Albanian immigrant (see Section 1.a.) as a setback for efforts to combat police impunity.

Corruption was a problem. While the anti-corruption unit of the Hellenic Police stated the problem was decreasing, human rights and anti-trafficking groups said that anti-corruption efforts needed to be a higher government priority.

The Constitution requires judicial warrants for arrests except when they are made during the commission of a crime, and the law prohibits arbitrary arrest orders; the authorities generally respected these provisions in practice. By law, the police must bring persons who are detained or arrested before an examining magistrate within 24 hours. The magistrate must issue a detention warrant or order the release within 3 days, unless special circumstances justify a 2-day extension of this limit.

On March 15, police detained Gazmend Kapllani, the President of the Albanian Migrants Forum and human rights activist, for 1 day for allegedly driving an uninsured motorbike (see Section 5).

Defendants brought to court on the day following the alleged commission of a misdemeanor may be tried immediately under expedited procedures. Although legal safeguards, including representation by counsel, apply in expedited procedure cases, the short time period limited defendants' ability to present an adequate defense. Defendants may request a delay in order to prepare a defense, but the court is not obliged to grant it. Expedited procedures were used in less than 10 percent of applicable cases.

The effective legal maximum duration of pretrial detention is 18 months for felonies and 9 months for misdemeanors. Defense lawyers asserted that pretrial detention is excessively long and overused by judges. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial, with or without bail. Pretrial detainees made up 31 percent of those incarcerated, contributing to overcrowding, according to government sources. A person convicted of a misdemeanor and sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment or less may, at the court's discretion, pay a fine instead of being imprisoned.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judicial system includes three levels of civil courts, (first instance, appeals, and supreme) and three levels of criminal courts (first instance--divided into misdemeanor and felony divisions, appeals, and supreme), appointed judges, and an examining magistrate system, with trials by judicial panels.

The Constitution provides for public trials, unless the court decides that privacy is required to protect victims and witnesses or a case involves national security. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence, the standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, the right to present evidence and call witnesses, and the right of access to the prosecution's evidence, to cross-examine witnesses, and to counsel. Lawyers are provided to defendants who are not able to afford legal counsel only in felony cases. Both the prosecution and the defense may appeal.

Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to a court-appointed interpreter. According to several immigrant associations in Athens, the low fees paid for such work often resulted in poor interpretation. Foreign defendants who used these interpreters frequently complained that they did not understand the proceedings at their trials. Defendants often were not advised of their rights during arrest in a language that they could understand. Several complained that they were not shown the Hellenic Police Informational Bulletin, which contains prisoners' rights in a variety of languages, and that they were forced to sign blank documents later used for their deportation.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

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

The Constitution prohibits the invasion of privacy and searches without warrants, and the law permits the monitoring of personal communications only under strict judicial controls; however, these provisions were not always respected in practice.

Police conducted regular raids and searches of Romani neighborhoods for alleged criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons (see Section 5).

Local authorities evicted or threatened to evict Roma from camps and tent dwellings during the year (see Section 5).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, legal restrictions on free speech remained in force. The law prohibits exposing to danger of disturbance the friendly relations of the state with foreign states; spreading false information and rumors liable to create concern and fear among citizens and cause disturbances in the country's international relations; and inciting citizens to rivalry and division leading to disturbance of the peace. It also prohibits inciting citizens to acts of violence or to disturbing the peace through disharmony among them. Those convicted of violations of these articles are allowed to convert their prison sentences, up to 3 years, into a fine of approximately \$17 (13.50 euros) per day.

In most criminal defamation cases, defendants typically were released on bail pending appeal without serving time in jail.

There were numerous independent newspapers and magazines. Satirical and opposition newspapers routinely criticized state authorities. Members of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities freely published materials, often in their native language.

The Constitution provides that the state exercise "immediate control" over radio and television, and the law establishes ownership limits on media frequencies. The Ministry of Press and Mass Media has final authority over radio and television licensing; the National Radio and Television Council has an advisory role.

The independent radio and television stations were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction. State-run stations tended to emphasize the Government's views but also reported objectively on other parties' programs and positions. Turkish-language television programs were widely available via satellite in Thrace.

The Constitution allows for seizure, by order of the public prosecutor, of publications that insult the President, offend religious beliefs, contain obscene articles, advocate violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military and defense information. Seizures were rare. In February, police confiscated approximately 50 copies of a comic book from bookstores on the grounds that it was insulting to the Christian faith.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet or academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, the courts continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations involving ethnic minorities (see Section 5).

Police permits were issued routinely for public demonstrations, and there were no reports that the permit requirement was abused. Peaceful demonstrations against government policies occurred regularly in Athens and other large cities. Seven protesters arrested at the June European Union (EU) summit in Thessaloniki, five of whom held hunger strikes during their incarceration, were released in December on bail.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, non-Orthodox groups at times faced administrative

obstacles or legal restrictions on religious practices.

Police regularly detained members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses (on average once every 2 weeks), usually after receiving complaints that the individuals were engaged in proselytizing. In most cases, these individuals were held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Many reported that they were not allowed to call their lawyers and that they were abused verbally by police officers for their religious beliefs.

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the "prevailing" religion. The Greek Orthodox Church exercised significant political and economic influence. The Government financially supported the Greek Orthodox Church, for example, paying for the salaries and religious training of clergy and financing the construction and maintenance of Church buildings. The Government also paid the salaries of the two official Muslim religious leaders ("muftis," Islamic judges and religious leaders with limited civic responsibilities) in Thrace and provided them with official vehicles.

The Government, by virtue of the Orthodox Church's status as the prevailing religion, recognizes de facto its canon law. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions.

The Government did not have an established procedure for recognition of religions. Recognition was indirectly granted by applying for and receiving a "house of prayer" permit. Some newer religions had problems getting these permits.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses is a recognized religion, members continued to face harassment in the form of arbitrary identity checks, difficulties in burying their dead, and local officials' resistance to construction of their churches.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Buddhists claimed that the lack of cremation as an available means of burial infringes on their religious rights; the remains of anyone who wished to be cremated must be shipped abroad.

Although Parliament approved a bill allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens area, construction had not started by year's end. The Orthodox Church and some local residents opposed the center, claiming it may "spread the ideology of Islam and the Arab world."

Some members of the Muslim community of Thrace disputed the Government's selection of official muftis. While most of the community accepted the two officially appointed muftis, some Muslims, with support from Turkey, "elected" two different muftis. The courts repeatedly convicted one mufti for usurping the authority of the official mufti; however, his sentences remained suspended and were pending appeal at year's end.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they face career limits in the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service due to their religion. The employment rate of Muslims in the public sector and in state-owned companies was much lower than the Muslim percentage of the population. The Government claimed and Muslims and Christians agreed that a lack of fluency in written and spoken Greek and the need for university degrees for high-level positions limited the number of Muslims eligible for government jobs.

The law requires that recognized religious groups obtain permits from the Ministry of Education and Religion in order to open houses of worship. By law, the Ministry may base a permit decision on the opinion of the local Greek Orthodox bishop. According to ministry officials, once a recognized religion received a permit, applications for additional houses of prayer were approved routinely. During the year, the Church of Scientology withdrew its appeal of a Ministry decision denying it a house of prayer permit and continued operating as a nonprofit civil law association. Non-Greek Orthodox churches must provide separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities.

The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that religious rites may not disturb public order or offend moral principles. During the year, Mormon missionaries reported that they were subject to harassment and police detention due to the legal prohibition on proselytizing.

Several foreign religious groups, including protestant groups and Mormons, reported difficulty renewing the visas of their non-EU citizen ministers because there is not a distinct visa category for religious workers and the Government's interpretation of its obligations to control entry to non-EU citizens under the Schengen Treaty.

Religious instruction was mandatory for all Greek Orthodox students in public primary and secondary schools, but not for non-Orthodox students. Some government-approved religious textbooks made derogatory statements about non-Greek Orthodox faiths. Members of the Muslim community in Athens sought Islamic religious instruction for their children. Since schools did not supervise non-Orthodox children while Greek Orthodox children were taking religious instruction, the community complained that parents were effectively forced to have their children attend Greek Orthodox classes.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist, particularly in the press. Vandalism of Jewish monuments continued to be a problem, although the Government strongly criticized the acts. Some schoolbooks continue to carry negative references to other religions.

In February and August, Jewish monuments and synagogues were desecrated. The Government condemned the desecration; however, police have not made any arrests in the cases.

Members of minority faiths reported incidents of societal discrimination. Greek Orthodox Church officials acknowledged that they refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups they considered harmful to Greek Orthodox worshippers and instructed their members to shun members of these faiths.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law permits the Government to remove citizenship from anyone who "commit acts contrary to the interests of Greece for the benefit of a foreign state." While the law applies to citizens regardless of ethnicity, it has been enforced, in all but one case, only against citizens who identified themselves as members of the "Macedonian" minority. The Government did not reveal the number of such cases; there were no reports of new cases during the year. Dual citizens who lost their citizenship under this provision sometimes were prevented from entering the country on the passport of their second nationality.

The Government has issued identification documents characterizing persons as "stateless" to 143 persons--mainly Muslims in Thrace--who lost their citizenship under a provision of the law that was repealed in 1998 and has permitted them to apply to reacquire citizenship. As of September, 63 of 111 applications had been granted and 48 were pending.

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided some protection against refoulement and granted refugee status to 3 out of 7,271 applicants during the first 10 months of the year. However, the Government has largely not enforced a 1999 presidential decree that brought the law into compliance with the standards of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to asylum procedures. The Government also provides temporary protection to individuals who do not qualify as asylees or refugees. During the first 10 months of the year, the Government granted temporary residence to 25 persons on humanitarian grounds until they could be repatriated abroad. The Government cooperated with the office of the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees.

Individuals recognized as refugees are eligible for residency and work permits necessary to settle permanently. The UNHCR expressed concern that very few applicants were granted asylum without its involvement and that a publicly funded legal aid system was not available to provide counseling for asylum-seekers and refugees.

In May, the Government refused to allow over 600 Kosovar refugees, primarily Roma who had been living in the Suto Orizari UNHCR camp in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), to enter the country. The Government rejected the request of the refugees, who were massed on the border with the FYROM, on the ground that they were not bona fide asylees.

In June 2002, a group of domestic and international NGOs published an appeal expressing concern over authorities' frequent violation of the rights of individuals who enter the country illegally, including local authorities' failure to inform them of their right to apply for asylum.

In July, the UNHCR expressed concern about the country's asylum policy and practices, citing insufficient reception

facilities, low refugee recognition rates, underdeveloped systems for providing for refugee welfare, and insufficient counseling to assist integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

Conditions for illegal immigrants detained by authorities were harsh. In 2002, 24 illegal immigrants by port authorities at an open area in the port of Mytilini on Lesbos, and 239 illegal immigrants in Mytilini were held in a facility designed for 70 persons. In September, 26 immigrants drowned in the Evros region while attempting to cross the border from Turkey. The Coast Guard reported 1,562 illegal immigrants were arrested by September. The Government generally did not seek out such individuals for deportation. Foreign observers reported "degrading" conditions in most of the refugee/immigrant detention centers in Thrace.

Deportations of both illegal and legal immigrants and abusive treatment by police were common. The police conducted many large-scale sweeps of neighborhoods populated by immigrants, temporarily detaining large numbers of individuals while determining their residence status.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

The Government was re-elected in free and fair elections held in April 2000. Opposition parties function freely and have broad access to the media. Voting is mandatory for citizens over age 18; however, there are many conditions under which citizens may be exempted from voting, and penalties were not applied in practice.

Romani representatives reported that local authorities sometimes deprived Roma of the right to vote by refusing to register them; however, Romani representatives also reported that some municipalities encouraged Roma to register. Municipalities may refuse to register Roma who did not fulfill basic residency requirements, which many Roma have trouble meeting.

There were 25 women members in the 300-seat Parliament. There was 1 woman among the 19 ministers in the Government and women held 2 of the 28 subministerial positions. A quota system requires 30 percent of all local government candidates to be women.

There were 2 members of the Muslim minority in the 300-seat Parliament. There were occasionally complaints that the state limited the right of some individuals, particularly Muslims and Slavo-Macedonians, to speak publicly and associate freely on the basis of their self-proclaimed ethnic identity.

Responsibility for oversight of rights provided to the Muslim minority in Thrace under the Treaty of Lausanne belongs to a government-appointed regional administrator of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs retains an advisory role.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A wide variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without restriction in the country, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The Government permitted domestic human rights organizations to operate, but cooperation with them varied. The Government usually cooperated with international human rights groups, had good working relations with them, and when feasible, took their views into account.

The government ombudsman's office received 536 complaints in the first 9 months of the year directly related to human rights. The ombudsman's office proved to be an effective means for resolving human rights and religious freedom concerns.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution provides for equality before the law irrespective of nationality, race, language, or political belief; however, government respect for these rights was inconsistent in practice.

Women

Violence against women was a problem. While the law prohibits all violence, it does not specifically prohibit domestic violence. The General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes (GSES), an independent government agency, provided counseling and assistance to domestic violence victims. The reported incidence of violence against women was low; however, the GSES believed that the actual incidence was high. The GSES estimated that only 6 to 10 percent of the victims contacted the police, and only a small fraction of those cases reached trial. Conviction rates for rape were low for first time offenders, but sentences were harsh for repeat offenders. While nonconsensual sex in any setting is a crime, law enforcement and courts did not treat spousal rape as harshly as extramarital rape.

The GSES claimed that police tended to discourage women from pursuing domestic violence charges and instead encouraged them to undertake reconciliation efforts. The GSES also claimed that the courts were lenient when dealing with domestic violence cases. The GSES, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Order, continued training courses for police personnel on how to treat domestic violence victims.

Two GSES shelters for battered women and their children, in Athens and Piraeus offered services, including legal and psychological help, but often were inadequately staffed. The GSES operated a 24-hour emergency telephone hotline for abused women. In June, the Ministry of Health and Welfare started the Emergency Social Care Unit (EKAKB), which operated a hotline providing referrals and psychological counseling. An interministerial committee composed of the GSES, the Ministry of Public Order, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Justice, shared information on women's issues.

Prostitution is legal at the age of 18. Prostitutes must register at the local prefecture and carry a medical card that is updated every 2 weeks. It was estimated that fewer than 1,000 women were legally employed as prostitutes; approximately 20,000 women, most of foreign origin, worked as illegal prostitutes. According to experts, a significant number of these women were trafficking victims (see Section 6.f.). Many anti-trafficking activists alleged that police accepted bribes from traffickers or were involved in trafficking rings.

The law prohibits sexual harassment. Trade unions reported that lawsuits for sexual harassment were very rare, and only four women filed such charges in the past 4 years. In all four cases, the courts reportedly imposed very lenient civil sentences. The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) women's section reported that sexual harassment was a widespread phenomenon, but that women were discouraged from filing charges against perpetrators by family members and coworkers, since they believed they might be socially stigmatized.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work; however, according to official statistics in 2001, women's pay amounted to 76.2 percent of men's pay.

Although relatively few occupied senior positions, women continued to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations such as the legal and medical professions in larger numbers. Women also were underrepresented in labor unions' leadership. According to the women's section of the GSEE, 58.6 percent of the country's long-term unemployed were women, while women constituted only 38 percent of the work force.

The GSES operated two regional employment offices for women, in Thessaloniki and Patras, and provided vocational training programs for unemployed women and programs to reinforce entrepreneurship, subsidies to women setting up businesses, and information and counseling to unemployed women. It also operated childcare facilities to enable unemployed women to attend training courses and look for a job.

Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded a system of public education and health care. Government agencies with responsibility for children's issues included the National Organization for Social Care, which has a national network of offices and is active in the field of child protection.

Education was free and compulsory through the ninth grade. According to the 2001 census, 99.4 percent of school-age children attended school. Noncompliance with the compulsory education requirement was not a significant problem outside the Roma community. University education was public and free at all levels.

There were some reports of violence against children, although there was no societal pattern of abuse. No national data existed on the incidence of child abuse; authorities, other than police, are not required to report such cases.

The law prohibits the mistreatment of children and sets penalties for violators, while welfare legislation provides for preventive and treatment programs for abused children and for children deprived of a family environment; it also

seeks to ensure the availability of alternative family care or institutional placement. A program to shelter street children from Albania was ended due to a lack of eligible children.

Children's rights advocacy groups claimed that the protection of high-risk children in state residential care centers was inadequate and of low quality. They cited lack of coordination between welfare services and the courts, inadequate funding of the welfare system, and poor staffing of residential care centers as systemic weaknesses in the treatment of child abuse. Athens had two municipal shelters for battered children. Child health specialists noted that the number of children in residential care facilities was decreasing, while the number in foster care was rising. With EU funding, special care was available for juvenile offenders, Romani children, children from remote mountain and island areas, and children with disabilities.

There were reports that prostitution and trafficking of children for forced labor and sexual exploitation was a problem (see Sections 6.d. and 6.f.).

Persons with Disabilities

The law mandates the hiring of persons with disabilities in public and private enterprises that employ more than 50 persons, but was poorly enforced, particularly in the private sector. The law states that persons with disabilities should account for 3 percent of employees in private enterprises. In the civil service, 5 percent of administrative staff and 80 percent of telephone operator positions are reserved for persons with disabilities. The law mandates the hiring of persons with disabilities in the public sector from a priority list. They are exempt from the civil service exam, and some have been appointed to important positions in the civil service. There was no societal discrimination against persons with disabilities.

The Construction Code mandates physical access for persons with disabilities to private and public buildings, but this law was enforced poorly. Research conducted during the year by the Medical School of Athens showed that many Athens sidewalks were unsafe for persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Anti-foreigner sentiment existed and was directed mainly at Albanians, who made up approximately 5 percent of the population. Approximately 500,000 of the estimated 1 million aliens in the country were Albanians. While Albanian legal residents encountered less official discrimination than Albanians residing in the country illegally, Albanian immigrants faced widespread societal discrimination. For example, the media regularly blamed Albanians for a reported rise in crime in recent years. The country's sometimes difficult relations with Albania intensified the problem.

In one high-profile case, a public debate over whether a "foreign" student should be allowed to carry the country's flag was conducted in the media when an ethnic Albanian earned the right to carry the flag in a local 2000 national day parade by achieving the highest marks in his school. The controversy resurfaced in October when the same student again earned the right to carry the flag, but was defused when he declined the honor, stating that he wished to avoid creating problems.

In March, the Government denied renewal of the residency permit of Gazmend Kapllani, the President of the Albanian Migrants Forum and human rights activist, on the ground that he presented a threat to public order and national security. On March 15, the police detained Kapllani for 1 day on the ground that he was allegedly driving an uninsured motorbike. On May 3, the Ombudsman told the newspaper *Eleftherotypia* that he had been unable to intervene in the case and noted that the relevant regulations gave police the opportunity to take arbitrary measures against foreigners, claiming vague reasons of order and national security. Authorities eventually renewed Kapllani's visa.

A number of citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks, Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites (Orthodox Christians who speak a dialect of Albanian), or "Macedonians" or "Slavomacedonians." The Government formally recognizes only the "Muslim minority" (see Section 2.c.), and does not officially acknowledge the existence of any ethnic groups, principally Slavophones, under the term "minority." However, the Government has affirmed an individual right of self-identification. As a result, some individuals who defined themselves as members of a minority found it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture. Use of the terms "Tourkos" and "Tourkikos" ("Turk" and "Turkish") is prohibited in titles of organizations, although individuals legally may call themselves "Tourkos." To most Greeks, the words "Tourkos" and "Tourkikos" connote Turkish identity or loyalties, and many object to their use by Greek citizens of Turkish origin. At year's end, an appeal from the "Turkish Union of Xanthi" and a petition for the establishment of a "Turkish Women's Union" were pending in court.

The Government does not recognize the Slavic dialect spoken by 10,000 to 50,000 persons in the northwestern area of the country as "Macedonian," a language distinct from Bulgarian. The minority's use of the term "Macedonian" has generated strong objections among the 2.2 million non-Slavophone inhabitants of the northern region of Macedonia, who use the same term to identify themselves. Members of the minority asserted that the Government pursued a policy designed to discourage use of their language. Members of the community said that they were forced to cancel plans to hold a conference in Florina in December because no one would rent them a meeting hall. There were reports that right-wing extremists threatened locals with violence if they participated in or facilitated the conference.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination. In April, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) issued a report that claimed that Roma were subject to systematic police abuse, mistreatment while in police custody, and regular raids and searches of Roma neighborhoods for criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons as well as educational discrimination (see Section 1.c.). There were anecdotal reports of societal discrimination such as landlords refusing to rent apartments to Roma and non-Roma parents withdrawing their children from schools attended by Roma children.

The law prohibits the encampment of "wandering nomads" without a permit and forces Roma to establish settlements "outside inhabited areas" and far from permanent housing. There were approximately 70 Romani camps with a total population between 100,000 and 120,000 persons. Local and international NGOs charged that the enforced separation contravenes the country's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Local authorities harassed and threatened to evict Roma from their camps or other dwellings. The NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor reported that police threatened to evict Romani tent-dwellers in Aspropyrgos in April and May. Roma in Tiryns are in a court battle to avoid eviction from a settlement there.

Roma frequently faced societal discrimination in employment and in housing, particularly when attempting to rent accommodations. The illiteracy rate among Roma was estimated at 80 percent. According to one NGO, the average Roma family's monthly income was approximately \$256 (205 euros) and the average life expectancy of Roma was below 60 years of age.

Poverty, illiteracy, and societal prejudice were most severe among migrant Roma or those who lived in quasi-permanent settlements. Most Romani camps had no running water, electricity, garbage disposal, or sewage treatment. The approximately 400 Roma families in Tyrnavos, Thessaly, lived in tents because the authorities refused to include the area in city planning. They attempted to build their own lavatories in order to improve their living conditions, but local authorities pulled them down and imposed fines for violating construction codes.

Romani representatives reported that some local authorities have refused to register Roma as residents. Until registered with a municipality, a citizen cannot vote or exercise other civil rights such as obtaining an official marriage, commercial, or driver's license, or contributing to social security. It was estimated that 90 percent of Roma were not insured by the public social security systems because they were unable to make the required contributions. Indigent Roma were entitled to free health care provided all citizens; however, their access at times was hindered by the distance between their encampments and public health facilities.

The Government considers the Roma to be a "socially excluded" or "sensitive" group, not a "minority." As a result, government policy is to encourage the integration of Roma. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education has instructed school principals to promote integration by encouraging alien parents to enroll their children in schools that are fewer than 40 percent foreign.

The Ministry of Interior headed an interministerial committee, which coordinated projects for the 85,000 and 120,000 Roma the Government estimated were in the country (unofficial estimates ranged from 250,000 to 300,000). In 2001, the Minister of Interior announced an approximately \$355 million (284 million euro) 5-year program to address Roma needs and to promote Roma integration, including housing, subsidized mortgage loans, and infrastructure in Roma camps, employment schemes, cultural and sports activities, and welfare allowances. By year's end, almost 50 percent of the funds budgeted for the project had been distributed. During the year, the Ministry of Interior invited 75 cities with Roma populations to identify areas in which the Ministry could build housing for Roma; by September, only 23 had responded.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare continued work on projects to address the chronic problems of the Roma community. The projects included training courses for civil servants, policemen, and teachers to "increase sensitivity to the problems of the Roma," the development of teaching materials for Roma children, and the establishment of six youth centers in areas close to Roma communities.

On October 8, unidentified individuals vandalized a Holocaust memorial in a Jewish cemetery in the northwestern city of Ioannina, the third case of anti-Semitism in that city in 18 months. By year's end, police had not made any arrests in the cases.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution and the law provide for the right of association, and workers exercised this right. All workers, with the exception of the military, have the right to form or join unions. Police have the right to form unions but not to strike. Approximately 26 percent of wage earners (nearly 650,000 persons) were organized in unions. Unions received most of their funding from a Ministry of Labor organization, the Workers' Hearth, which distributes mandatory contributions from employees and employers. Workers, employers, and the state were represented in equal numbers on the board of directors of the Workers' Hearth. Approximately 10 public sector unions had dues withholding provisions in their contracts, in addition to receiving Workers' Hearth subsidies.

Over 4,000 unions were grouped into regional and sectoral federations and two umbrella confederations; one for civil servants (ADEDY), and another, the GSEE, for private sector employees and employees of state enterprises. Unions were highly politicized, and there were party-affiliated factions within the labor confederations; however, neither political parties nor the government controlled day-to-day operations. There are no restrictions on who may serve as a union official.

Anti-union discrimination is prohibited. The Labor Inspectorate or a court investigates complaints of discrimination against union members or organizers. Court rulings have mandated the reinstatement of improperly fired union members.

Unions are free to join international associations and maintain a variety of international affiliations, and almost all did so.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law provides for the right to organize and bargain collectively in the private sector and in public corporations, and unions exercised these rights freely. There are no restrictions on collective bargaining for private sector employees.

Civil servants have the right to organize and bargain collectively with the Ministry of Public Administration.

The law provides for mediation procedures, with compulsory arbitration as a last resort. A National Mediation, Reconciliation, and Arbitration Organization was used in the private sector and public corporations (the military and civil service excluded). While mediation is voluntary, failure to agree during mediation makes arbitration compulsory, as decided by the mediation organization.

Legal restrictions on strikes include a mandatory period of notice, which was 4 days for public utilities and 24 hours for the private sector. The law mandates a skeleton staff during strikes affecting public services, such as electricity, transportation, communications, and banking. Public utility companies, state-owned banks, the postal service, Olympic Airways, and the railroads also are required to maintain a skeleton staff during strikes. The courts have the power to declare strikes illegal, although such decisions seldom were enforced. However, unions complained that this judicial power serves as a deterrent to some of their members from participating in strikes. The courts declared some strikes illegal during the year for reasons such as failure of the union to give adequate advance notice of the strike, or the addition of demands by the union during the course of the strike. No striking workers were prosecuted.

Many strikes took place during the year. Although most strikes were fairly brief, they affected productivity and disrupted daily life in the country. Strikes by public sector employees, including mass transport employees, lasted between 1 and 5 days and primarily concerned securing timely pay increases and greater job security.

Three free trade zones operate according to EU regulations. The labor laws apply equally in these zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such

practices occurred among children (see Section 6.d.). Women and children were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

Child labor was a problem. The Greek chapter of UNICEF estimated that 5,800 children were illegally employed in the streets of the country in jobs from windshield washing to prostitution and that they generated approximately \$3.5 million (3 million euros) in revenue yearly. The Government and NGOs believed that the majority of beggars were either Roma or Albanian. There were reports that approximately 1,000 children from Albania were trafficked and forced to beg (see Section 6.f.). Some parents forced their children to beg for money or food. During the year, the number of street children who panhandled or peddled at city intersections on behalf of adult family members or for criminal gangs decreased.

The minimum age for employment in the industrial sector is 15 years, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age is 12 years in family businesses, theaters, and the cinema. These age limits were enforced by occasional Labor Inspectorate spot checks and generally were observed; however, families engaged in agriculture, food service, and merchandising often had younger family members assisting them at least part time.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The GSEE and the Employers' Association determine a nationwide minimum wage through collective bargaining. The Ministry of Labor routinely ratifies this minimum wage, which has the force of law and applies to all workers. The minimum wage of approximately \$31.30 (25 euros) daily and \$665 (532 euros) monthly, effective July 1, provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours in the private sector and 37.5 hours in the public sector. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of 1 month per year, and sets limits on overtime.

Legislation provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety. The GSEE characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory, but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate. Workers do not have the legal right to remove themselves from situations that they believe endanger their health; however, they do have the right to lodge a confidential complaint with the Labor Inspectorate. Inspectors have the right to close down machinery or a process for up to 5 days if they see safety or health hazards that they believe represent an imminent danger to the workers.

Foreign workers are protected by law, but in practice their wages were lower and they worked longer hours than citizens. Many employers did not make social security contributions for illegal foreign workers, making their legalization impossible.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were large numbers of persons trafficked to, from, and within the country, primarily women and girls for sexual exploitation.

Under the law, trafficking in persons is a criminal offense. The law provides for imprisonment and fines of convicted traffickers and for shelters and medical assistance for trafficking victims. Courts may sentence traffickers to prison terms of up to 10 years and impose fines of approximately \$12,500 to \$62,500 (10,000 to 50,000 euros). There were harsher penalties for child traffickers.

Between October 2002 and September, police investigated 394 trafficking cases, arrested 476 people, and found 30 victims of trafficking. In June, the police led an international anti-trafficking effort called "Operation Leda."

The country was both a transit and destination country for trafficked women and children. Major countries of origin include Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, and Romania. Women from many other countries were trafficked to the country and in some cases were reportedly trafficked on to Cyprus, Turkey and the Middle East.

Trafficking in women and children for prostitution in the country increased sharply in the last few years. One academic observer estimated that approximately 40,000 women and children, most between the ages of 12 and 25, were trafficked to the country each year for prostitution. Unofficial estimates placed 17,000 trafficked women and girls in the country at any given time, although authorities estimated the number of trafficked women and children was much lower.

Trafficking of children was a problem. While there were reports that child trafficking has decreased, the practice persisted. Most child trafficking victims were Albanian Roma children trafficked for labor exploitation or teenage girls trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. Albanian children make up the majority of children trafficked for forced labor, begging and stealing. There were reports that some Roma Albanian parents "sell" or "rent" their children to traffickers in exchange for a monthly income; it was estimated that more than 1,000 children were trafficked and forced to beg (see Section 6.d.). There were reports that teenage boys worked as prostitutes in Athens. In September, police arrested 11 Romanians for operating a forced child begging racket in central Athens.

Police often detained minors trafficked into the country as criminals. Those under 12 years of age were placed in reception centers, children as young as 13 were jailed for begging or illegal immigration. According to one NGO, the Government detained and deported children in groups and returned them to the Albanian border without ensuring their reception by Albanian authorities or their protection from re-trafficking. Child authorities in Thessaloniki reported the assisted repatriation of 191 trafficked children between the ages of 5 and 17 years. However, few repatriations were conducted with advance notice to prepare families and transport the children safely. Some reports indicated that children were deported with less than 24 hours notice and without sufficient cross-border coordination. In September, the Government began holding conferences and developing cross-border cooperation mechanisms against child trafficking as part of a greater anti-trafficking initiative.

Some women and children arrived as "tourists" or illegal immigrants; seeking work, they were lured into prostitution by club owners who threatened them with deportation. Traffickers kidnapped some victims, including minors, from their homes and smuggled them into the country, where they were sold to local procurers. Traffickers often confined victims to apartments, hotels, and clubs against their will, failed to register them with authorities, and forced them to surrender their passports. Frequently, connections existed between illegal prostitution and other criminal activities.

Local police corruption played a role in facilitating trafficking into the country. NGOs reported that some police officers were paid by organized crime networks involved in trafficking.

In August, the Government adopted a Presidential decree which provides for the establishment of shelters for trafficking victims and encourages cooperation between the Government and NGOs. In September, the NGO *Medicins du Monde* began operating a shelter for trafficking victims, but victim protection measures and referral mechanisms remained weak. Some trafficked women were placed in battered women's shelters operated by the Orthodox Church-affiliated NGO KESO. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated funds for a number of anti-trafficking projects. A number of domestic NGOs also worked on trafficking issues during the year. A coalition of NGOs created the "Stop Now" group, which created public service announcements to raise awareness of trafficking issues. Another NGO established a shelter in Athens for trafficked women with government funding.

While the law permits court prosecutors to allow women who press charges against their traffickers to remain in the country legally, anecdotal reports indicated that trafficking victims continued to be deported.

During the year, 10 television stations ran public service announcements on child trafficking and major radio stations and magazines carried announcements on trafficking in women. In October and November, the NGO Stop Now distributed anti-trafficking brochures with funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.