



2008 Human Rights Report: Greece

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

[2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)

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Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy with an estimated population of 11 million. In September 2007 the New Democracy Party won a slim majority of seats in the unicameral Vouli (parliament) in free and fair elections, and Konstantinos Karamanlis remained the prime minister. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in several areas. Human rights abuses reported during the year included: reports of abuse by security forces, particularly of undocumented immigrants and Roma; overcrowding and harsh conditions in some prisons; detention of undocumented migrants in squalid conditions; some legal restrictions on freedom of speech (although not enforced in practice); restrictions and administrative obstacles faced by members of non-Orthodox religions, including serious delays in receiving permits; detention and deportation of unaccompanied or separated immigrant minors, including asylum seekers; failure to provide adequate protection to victims of domestic violence; discrimination against Romani children in education; exploitation of Romani children through begging and forced labor; trafficking in persons; limits on the ability of ethnic minority groups to self-identify; and discrimination against and social exclusion of ethnic minorities, particularly Roma. A large number of Roma lacked access to adequate housing, basic medical care, public services, and employment opportunities.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed any politically motivated killings during the year; however, a police officer killed one person.

On December 6, a police officer killed 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in the Exarchia district in Athens, as Grigoropoulos and other youths reportedly were throwing rocks at a police vehicle. Authorities arrested the officer and his partner in connection with the shooting. The officer claimed that he fired warning shots and did not aim at Grigoropoulos. Autopsy and ballistics reports, requested by the victim's family, indicated that Grigoropoulos was killed by a ricochet bullet. The official investigation into the circumstances of the shooting was still pending at year's end. The shooting touched off more than a month of riots and demonstrations by youths and self-styled anarchists in cities across the country that resulted in injuries to dozens of civilians and police as well as an estimated 1 billion euros (approximately \$1.4 billion) in property damage. Both policemen were in custody at year's end on as yet undetermined charges.

In January a special Navy tribunal acquitted the coast officer involved in the August 2007 shooting death of a Greek citizen of all charges. Prosecutors had charged the officer with "reckless wounding." Coast guard officers had fired

at the man after he reportedly failed to stop for a boat check. He later died in a hospital.

A trial was pending at year's end in the case of a border guard who shot and killed an Albanian migrant who was attempting to cross the Greek-Albanian border illegally in November 2007.

In September four Georgian migrants were killed in marked minefields in the Evros area on the Greek-Turkish border. During the previous 17 years, 72 persons died in the Evros minefields.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The law prohibits such practices; however, during the year there was an increase in nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports of abuse by police forces and the Coast Guard, particularly of undocumented immigrants, asylum seekers, and Roma.

On December 11, Amnesty International (AI) reported that police used unlawful and excessive force against peaceful demonstrators protesting the December 6 police shooting of Alexandros Grigoropoulos. AI alleged that two of its members were beaten with police batons and criticized police for not discriminating between peaceful protesters and violent anarchists.

On February 8, the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) released a report on the visit by a CPT delegation to the country in February 2007. The report noted that there had been no improvement since the previous CPT visit in 2005 in the treatment of persons detained by law enforcement agencies and that the delegation received many allegations of mistreatment of detainees by law enforcement officials. Most of the allegations consisted of slaps, punches, kicks, and blows with batons, inflicted upon arrest or during police questioning. In one example, a detainee alleged that he was punched in the head and body by officers at the Alexandroupoli police station and that officers had threatened to sever his right forefinger with pliers. The detainee further stated that, while being held over a table by two officers, his trousers were pulled down and he was threatened with rape by a third officer. In several cases, CPT medical experts examined detainees' wounds and found their allegations to be credible and consistent with injuries from slaps, kicks, and baton blows.

NGOs regularly reported that police beat and mistreated immigrants, including minors. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in November that asylum seekers and migrants were regularly beaten during arrest and while in detention. The NGO, Network of Social Support to Refugees and Immigrants, alleged that incidents of police abuse against foreign street vendors occurred almost daily.

In March the secretary of the Foreigner Immigrants Union of Larisa alleged that he was beaten by Thessaloniki police officers when he visited the station to report a problem. He claimed that he was beaten on his fingers with an iron bar more than 80 times and that he was punched and kicked several times. The victim alerted the Albanian consular authorities to the incident and filed criminal charges, which were pending in court at year's end.

In June seven police officers and the director of the Corinth police station reportedly tortured and abused a 35-year-old mentally ill Romanian national and left him in a field in a remote area. The officers involved were suspended and the prosecutor ordered an inquiry into possible charges of torture, insult to human dignity, serious bodily harm, and theft. The inquiry was pending at year's end.

In July, according to media reports, the Patras Port Authority handcuffed undocumented migrants to public benches and trees outside port authority offices. Officials responded that they were handcuffing the migrants outside because the detention center had been destroyed by an earthquake and was unsafe for the detainees. At year's end the Port Authority was using metal containers to hold arrested migrants, a practice that NGOs condemned as inhuman and degrading.

In March two police officers and two border guards were dismissed after a video surfaced showing officers abusing two Albanian migrants in police custody after their 2006 arrest on drug charges. A video of the incident was posted to the Web site YouTube.com and was aired on Greek television. Criminal charges against the officers for torture and breach of duty were pending at year's end.

There were multiple reports of the Coast Guard treating undocumented immigrants, including minors, in a cruel manner. In February AI called for an investigation into the case of 13 Afghan migrants, eight of whom were minors, who were allegedly intercepted by the Coast Guard, beaten and robbed, put in an inflatable dinghy, and forced to return to Turkey. In July undocumented immigrants on the island of Samos alleged that they were slapped and beaten during their interrogation by coast guard officers. In September immigrant detainees in Patras rioted after coast guard officers allegedly seriously injured two Afghan migrants. In a December report on unaccompanied migrant children, HRW alleged that on multiple occasions coast guard officers beat minors after intercepting them at sea.

There were continued reports of police mistreatment of Roma, and human rights advocates accused the court system of failing to prosecute abusive police officers. In April the Appeals Court acquitted a police officer who had allegedly beaten a Romani man, Theodoros Stefanou, in 2001 on the island of Cephalonia. At the initial trial, the officer was suspended and his three-year prison sentence was commuted to a fine, but the victim and a human rights defender claimed that they were never summoned to the trial. With legal aid from the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), an NGO, in January 2007 the victim took his case to the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR), alleging mistreatment, excessive length of proceedings, and the failure of the authorities to investigate promptly due to his Romani ethnicity. The case was pending at year's end.

In July the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) found that the country had violated the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that prohibit torture and establish the right to an effective remedy for abuses. The HRC found a lack of a proper investigation into the alleged police brutality against ethnic Romani citizen Andreas Kalamiotis in 2001, in Athens. The state was given six months to provide the victim with an effective remedy and appropriate reparation and to report on measures taken to prevent similar violations in the future. The government had not taken any remedial measures by year's end.

The criminal investigation of two police officers on the island of Rhodes in connection with the alleged multiple rapes of a Bulgarian woman in 2006 and the trial of a homicide police officer for the attempted rape of a Greek woman in 2007 were both pending at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained inadequate due to continued overcrowding and outdated facilities. Some prisons and detention centers continued to hold minors in the same cells as adults. While prison capacity increased overall, partly due to construction during the year of a new prison facility for women in Thebes, the number of inmates also grew. The Ministry of Justice reported that, as of September, the total prison population was 11,798, while the official capacity of the prison system was 7,543.

The ombudsman for human rights noted during the year that overcrowding in prisons had not been addressed and

that this was leading to disciplinary problems and criminal behavior in the prisons. For the third year in a row, the ombudsman formally complained that the Ministry of Justice denied his representatives access to prisons and detention facilities.

In November an estimated 8,000 inmates nationwide staged an 18-day hunger strike protesting overcrowding in prisons. The protest spurred riots and arson attacks by anarchist groups in Athens and Thessaloniki in support of the inmates who were on hunger strikes. Prisoners ended the strike after the Ministry of Justice announced an early release of up to 5,500 prisoners and new measures for improving prison conditions, including integrating cumulative disciplinary penalties for prisoners and reducing the maximum pretrial detention period from 18 months to 12 months. The early releases began in December.

AI, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the NGO Pro-Asyl, the government-appointed ombudsman for human rights, the European Commission, HRW, and Doctors Without Borders (MSF) noted during the year that conditions in detention centers for undocumented aliens were unacceptable and amounted to a serious violation of human rights. The UNHCR expressed its concern for the situation in some Aegean Island detention centers. An MSF fact-finding mission in July visited detention centers and expressed its concerns for what it termed a "continuing humanitarian crisis."

AI noted in its annual country report, released in May, that an increase in the number of deaths in prisons and in police custody raised serious concerns about the lack of effective monitoring of the handling of detainees and prisoners. AI also reported that minors were among the refugees and migrants being held at detention centers.

The NGO Prisoners' Rights Initiative reported in March that 440 inmates died in prisons and police detention centers between 1997 and 2007. Although some deaths were drug-related or self-inflicted, there were also cases in which the circumstances were disputed, and the authorities were indifferent to the lives of inmates.

In June the ECHR ruled against the government in the case of an inmate held in prison for trafficking antiques and drug possession. The ECHR concluded that authorities had not fulfilled their obligation to safeguard the inmate's health by providing him the appropriate medical care and that this omission amounted to inhuman treatment. The country was ordered to pay the victim 8,000 euros (approximately \$12,000) in damages, costs, and expenses.

There were multiple reports that prison or detention center guards mistreated prisoners. In July and September protests and hunger strikes took place in immigrant detention centers on Leros and Samos islands due to overcrowding and alleged mistreatment.

In September MSF announced that it would withdraw from the detention center on Lesbos due to a lack of support from authorities. MSF stated that police hampered its efforts to offer medical care and improve conditions in the detention center. In October media reported that hundreds of immigrant detainees on Lesbos fell ill from drinking contaminated water from the detention center's moldy and rusted pipes.

During its February 2007 visit to the country, the CPT examined the treatment of persons detained by law enforcement authorities, focusing on Korydallos prison and detention facilities for illegal immigrants in Attica, the eastern Aegean, and Thrace. The delegation visited prisons, police detention centers, police stations, and holding facilities for illegal immigrants. In its February report on the visit, the CPT reiterated that prisons remained largely overcrowded; prison violence appeared to be on the rise; conditions of detention in police facilities generally were unsatisfactory, in certain cases constituting inhuman or degrading treatment; and facilities designed for holding suspects for short periods were inappropriately used for prolonged incarceration.

In one case, the CPT noted that a Bangladeshi national, who had alleged police brutality at Athens International

Airport after he had refused deportation and who had visible injuries, only received medical treatment after the CPT intervened. In another case, a detainee at the Omonia police station, who had alleged police abuse and required medical attention, was told by police that he would be immediately deported unless he informed the CPT delegation that he no longer wished to see a doctor.

The CPT observed that the Korydallos prison remained overcrowded and that no noticeable improvement had occurred since its 2005 visit. The CPT found that three or four prisoners were placed in cells designed for a single occupant and that health care remained inadequate for a prison of its size. The CPT also reported that in the Petrou Ralli facility in Athens, detainees were confined to their cells 24 hours a day, had no recreational spaces, and were kept in cells that did not have toilet facilities or call bells. At the time of its visit, the CPT found that some minors did not have beds and were sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

The Samos facility that opened in 2007, while much improved over the island's previous detention center, held over 500 detainees and was already crowded beyond capacity.

In November diplomatic observers toured the Fylakio detention center, opened in March 2007, and found conditions to be clean, well-lit, and climate-controlled. Male and female detainees were held in separate facilities comprised of large, compartmented rooms with bunk beds for each detainee. There were no families or minors in the detention center. The building had a cafeteria, outdoor recreational facilities, a telephone room, and an infirmary with four beds. Police authorities stated that there were 279 detainees in the center; they reported that the center had an official maximum capacity of 375, but that in their opinion the center would be overcrowded with any more than 320 detainees. Police officials also said that the Venna, Peplos, and Tychemo detention centers (long criticized by the CPT and other NGOs for squalid conditions) had closed due to reduced numbers of new illegal immigrant arrivals in the Evros border region during the year.

In November HRW described "inhuman and degrading" conditions in multiple prisons and detention facilities. In December HRW alleged that unaccompanied migrant minors were routinely detained in the same cells as adults.

The government permitted the CPT to conduct periodic and ad hoc visits to prisons, detention centers, and mental hospitals, most recently in September. Other NGOs, such as HRW, were inconsistently granted access to prisons and detention facilities. During the year international human rights groups reported fewer problems receiving permission for prison and detention center visits than did local human rights groups, and the International Committee of the Red Cross had a regular program for prison visits. However, there was insufficient access to detention centers for independent organizations wanting to screen for trafficking victims.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. However, police continued to conduct large-scale sweeps and temporarily detained large numbers of foreigners, often under crowded and squalid conditions, while determining their residence status.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The police are responsible for law enforcement and the maintenance of order within the country and are under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order. The Coast Guard is responsible for law enforcement in territorial waters and is under the authority of the Ministry of Mercantile Marine. While the country's law enforcement agencies were generally effective, police sometimes did not fully investigate self-styled "anti-imperialist" anarchists, who used crude gas canister bombs and Molotov cocktails to attack property, government offices, targets representing "Western interests," and the police, particularly in central Athens.

In the nationwide protests and riots that followed the December 6 death of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in an altercation with a police officer, anarchists wielding petrol bombs destroyed vehicles and commercial and government offices, causing an estimated 1 billion euros (approximately \$1.4 billion) in property damage. Media criticized the police for failing to protect businesses from violent rioters and looters. There were media allegations that government leaders, seeking to avoid a further escalation of violence, directed the police to take a defensive posture in response to the riots.

Police corruption continued to be a problem. During the year the police Bureau of Internal Affairs took several disciplinary measures, including dismissal and suspension, against officers involved in corruption, primarily for forging documents and for taking bribes. Most charges against police involved violation of duty, issuing false certificates, abuse of power, corruption, violations with arms and explosives, illegally releasing persons in police custody, pimping, and violations related to alien registration.

In contrast with the previous year, NGOs and the media reported more frequently on police corruption, criticizing the prevalence of lenient punishments for officers, such as suspended sentences, small fines, or acquittals. The ombudsman noted that the lack of adequate punishment meant that there was no effective deterrent against police corruption and that the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order apparently lacked the will to combat police corruption. During the year the GHM reported that, of 238 police mistreatment cases brought against law enforcement personnel from 2003-07, only one police officer was dismissed.

Four Thessaloniki police officers, including the former director of the Ano Poli police station, were discharged from service by a police disciplinary board in February. The officers had issued fraudulent documents to approximately 50 Albanian nationals seeking residence permits in Thessaloniki. The Albanian nationals had paid 500 to 1,500 euros (approximately \$750 to \$2,250) bribes for the papers. A police lieutenant was given a 16-month suspended sentence, while the three other officers were acquitted of all charges.

In June the police Bureau of Internal Affairs dismantled a network of border guards, police, and intelligence personnel that was smuggling undocumented aliens and stolen vehicles from Albania into the country. The bureau filed criminal charges and the case was pending at year's end.

In July two police officers were given prison sentences of two and 18 months, respectively, for offering protection to an illegal electronic gambling shop in Thessaloniki.

In November eight Thessaloniki police officers were convicted in connection with the beating of a Cypriot student in 2006. The officers were convicted of causing bodily harm and were given sentences ranging from 15-39 months, with the option to avoid jail time by paying five euros (approximately \$8) for each day of the sentence. The former police precinct director in place at the time of the beating was convicted for neglecting his supervisory duty and given a suspended 15-month sentence. The policemen appealed their convictions, which were pending at year's end. Press and local NGOs criticized the punishments as lenient.

In November five coast guard officers in the port city of Patras were arrested on charges of alien smuggling and forming a criminal organization. The Ministry of Mercantile Marine ordered an inquiry into the case and replaced the harbormaster. The results of the inquiry had not been announced by year's end.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires judicial warrants for arrests, except when they are made during the commission of a crime, and prohibits arbitrary arrest orders. Authorities generally respected these provisions in practice. Police are required to bring persons who are detained or arrested before an examining magistrate within 24 hours. The magistrate is then

required to issue a detention warrant or order their release within three days unless special circumstances justify a two-day extension of detention. Bail is available for defendants detained or arrested on felony charges, unless the judicial officer determines that the defendant is a flight risk or a danger to the community.

The law provides that persons in detention have the right to contact a close relative or another third party, to have access to a lawyer, and to have access to a doctor. However, during its 2007 visit to the country, the CPT found that the government did not respect these rights in practice. The CPT heard a number of allegations that access to a lawyer had been delayed for periods of up to three days. In most of these cases, the persons detained, mainly foreigners, alleged that they were mistreated during arrest and interrogation. The CPT received a number of complaints from illegal immigrants in detention that they were only provided information sheets explaining their rights in Greek, and that they were either physically coerced or verbally threatened with mistreatment to ensure that they signed an acknowledgement on the information sheets.

Defendants have the right to legal counsel. In felony cases the bar association provides lawyers to defendants who prove they cannot afford legal counsel.

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 to prepare a defense, but the court is not obliged to grant their requests. Expedited procedures were used in less than 10 percent of applicable cases.

The ombudsman asserted in his annual report that the number of complaints from citizens about violations of personal freedoms in the course of police action remained high. These violations included: taking citizens to detention centers for arbitrary identity checks, using insulting language and threats of force, and conducting bodily searches in public. The ombudsman noted an increase in the number of complaints that police conducted investigations without soliciting testimony from victims. Police reportedly targeted persons based on their race, color, nationality, or presence in high-crime areas.

The 2006 case concerning the alleged abduction of 14 Pakistani permanent residents was still pending at year's end.

The law allows pretrial detention for up to 18 months for cases involving alleged felonies and for up to nine months for misdemeanors involving "multiple accidental manslaughters." Some defense lawyers asserted that pretrial detention was supposed to be reserved for exceptional cases but had become the norm. They also argued that the detention period was excessively long and that, although the code of criminal procedure expressly excludes "seriousness of the crime" as a criterion, it is usually the main reason for extended detention in practice. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial with or without bail. Pretrial detainees made up approximately 30 percent of those incarcerated and contributed to prison overcrowding, according to figures provided by the Ministry of Justice.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected this provision in practice; however, observers reported that the judiciary was subject to influence. On several occasions in 2006 and 2007, the ECHR criticized the government for unreasonably long trials and found the court system to be inefficient. During the year two judges were dismissed on corruption related charges. Several ongoing corruption investigations of as many as twenty judges were still pending at year's end. One judge fled the country and was in hiding abroad at year's end. The judiciary acted more leniently toward those claiming a political motivation for their acts of property

destruction (so-called anarchists) than it did for those who did not claim a political motivation. For example, anarchists were frequently given suspended prison sentences in lieu of prison time or fines.

On August 13, the GHM sent a letter to the prosecutor and the president of the Supreme Court listing 39 recent litigation cases on behalf of, or against, Roma. The GHM charged that cases against Roma were usually investigated promptly; however, cases brought by Roma concerning serious violations of human rights took several years to move through the legal process and rarely led to indictments or convictions. Furthermore, the GHM noted that police mistreatment cases filed by Roma almost always resulted in acquittals for the officers charged.

After the December 6 death of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos, authorities arrested a police officer and his partner. The investigation of the incident was ongoing at year's end. Officials of both the government and opposition parties made statements that observers noted implied presumption of the officer's guilt. In the aftermath of the shooting, mainstream media condemned the police officers as guilty of murder. Independent observers expressed concern that such statements presupposed the officers' guilt and jeopardized the defendants' right to a fair trial.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Trials are public in most instances, and juries are used in all first- and second-degree felony cases. An antiterrorism statute permits denial of the right to a jury trial in cases of violent terrorism. Defendants have the right to be present at trial and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. An attorney is provided at public expense if indigent defendants face serious criminal charges. Defendants may confront and question witnesses against them and present witnesses and evidence on their behalf. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal. Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to a court-appointed interpreter.

Some NGOs reported during the year that court interpretation was inadequate for non-Greek speakers; however, diplomatic observers noted good-quality interpretation at trials specifically for foreign victims of trafficking.

The government recognizes Shari'a (Islamic religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is a generally independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters. There are no administrative remedies available beyond the judicial remedies for alleged wrongs.

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

The law prohibits such actions; however, these provisions were not always respected in practice.

Police and prosecutors regularly conducted raids and searches of Romani and migrant neighborhoods, frequently entering homes without authorization in search of criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons. Local authorities evicted Roma from camps and tent dwellings during the year, and threatened to evict others. NGOs and media regularly

reported that law enforcement authorities beat or harassed unlicensed immigrant street vendors and undocumented immigrants.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and law provide 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 speech that endangers or disturbs the country's relations with foreign states, spreads false information or rumors causing fear among citizens, causes rivalry or division among citizens, or incites citizens to disturb the peace or commit acts of violence. In practice these legal prohibitions were seldom invoked. In most criminal defamation cases, defendants were released on bail pending appeal without serving time in jail.

Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal, and the government did not attempt to impede this criticism.

There were numerous independent newspapers and magazines in circulation, and they generally expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

The law provides for the government to exercise "immediate control" over radio and television stations and establishes ownership limits on media frequencies. However, independent radio and television stations were active and expressed a wide variety of views with little or no government restriction. State-operated stations tended to emphasize the government's views but also reported objectively on other parties' programs and positions.

The requirement of the 2007 media law that radio and television stations broadcast primarily in Greek had no practical effect on the existing Turkish-language radio stations in Thrace.

The law allows for seizure, by order of the public prosecutor, of publications that insult the president, offend Christianity "or any other known religion," contain obscene articles, advocate violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military and defense information. The government did not charge any individuals with violation of this law during the year.

The law punishes "whoever intentionally incites others to actions that could provoke discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups of persons on the basis of their race or ethnic origin or expresses ideas insulting to persons or to groups of persons because of their race or ethnic origin."

The GHM and the Central Board of Jewish Communities brought charges against the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former LAOS political party candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. In December 2007 *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted, but Plevris received a 14-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred and racial violence with his book *The Jews - The Whole Truth*. The book denied the Holocaust and called Jewish people "mortal enemies" and "subhuman." Plevris appealed the sentence; the appeal trial had not begun by year's end.

On March 5, the misdemeanors court of Athens sentenced three journalists of *Eleftheros Kosmos* to seven-month suspended sentences for insulting Jews. The journalists appealed the sentence. In September the appeals court unanimously changed the terms from seven to five-month suspended sentences.

In September an Athens appeals court sentenced the publisher and a former columnist of the weekly newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* for anti-Semitism in a 2006 column. The columnist had criticized Thessaloniki's small Jewish

community, decimated during the Holocaust, writing "thank God, less than 1,500 are left." Each defendant was given a five-month suspended sentence.

In December, after the start of Israeli military action in Gaza, the left-of-center newspaper *Eleftherotypia* printed anti-Semitic cartoons and satire, joining smaller extremist publications that compared Jews to Nazis or held them responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

In October media in Thessaloniki reported that two editors of *Millet*, a local paper published in Turkish, were given 12-month suspended sentences for inciting hatred against the Pomak community.

According to an October report by Reporters Without Borders, journalist Makis Nodaros was assaulted by two unknown persons. Nodaros was a regular contributor to articles in the daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia* about government corruption and financial mismanagement. No investigation had begun by year's end.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could generally engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. Internet was available throughout the country and widely used.

The libel and defamation trial of an internet blog administrator who criticized a Greek Orthodox televangelist had not begun by year's end. The blogger was charged in 2006 for comments that appeared on one of his Web sites allegedly calling the televangelist "stupid" for claiming that all things on earth came from Greece.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government did not restrict academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

The December 6 death of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos touched off more than a month of riots and demonstrations. Peaceful demonstrators were joined by violent, self-styled, anarchists and arsonists. Using Molotov cocktails, petrol bombs, rocks, and other projectiles, violent protesters injured dozens of police officers and destroyed vehicles and commercial and government property estimated at one billion euros (approximately \$1.4 billion). The police used tear gas and force, including baton strikes, to disperse violent protesters.

On December 11, AI alleged that two of its members were beaten with police batons and criticized police for not discriminating between peaceful protesters and violent anarchists.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association; however, the courts continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations involving certain ethnic minorities.

In 2006 the group "Home of Macedonian Culture" took its case regarding the denial of the organization's legal

status to the Supreme Court. It remained pending as of year's end.

The government prohibited associations that used the term "Turkish" in their names. The ECHR ruled in March that the country was violating the freedom of association of the Muslim minority by dissolving the Turkish Union of Xanthi, established in 1927, after 21 years of legal proceedings (1983-2005). The ECHR also ruled against the government's refusal to register the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi. The Greek courts, citing the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, had objected to the use of the word "Turkish" because the Greek government officially only recognized a "Muslim" religious minority, not a "Turkish" ethnic one. Greece appealed the decision, but the ECHR rejected the appeal in October. In December the Turkish Union of Xanthi requested recognition from the First Instance Court of Xanthi, in line with the ECHR decision. The case was heard on December 11, but the court had not issued a decision by year's end.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion. However, non-Orthodox groups at times faced administrative obstacles or legal restrictions on their religious practices.

The law establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the "prevailing" religion. The Greek Orthodox Church continued to exercise significant political and economic influence. The government recognized de facto the Orthodox canon law. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Orthodox Church were not routinely extended to other recognized religions. Orthodox Church officials refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups that they considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers, and they instructed their members to shun members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Protestant, and evangelical Christian churches.

The government supported the Greek Orthodox Church financially and paid the salaries and some expenses of the three official Muslim religious leaders, or muftis, in Thrace. In addition, the government announced in February 2007 that it would hire 240 imams as public employees in Thrace. As of year's end, the Ministry of Education and Religion was reviewing applications for the imam positions. Jewish leaders requested that the government pay the salaries of rabbis, given the practice of paying for Orthodox priests and Muslim muftis; the government had not responded to this request by year's end.

The Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic communities are the only religious groups deemed "legal entities of public law," able to own, bequeath, and inherit property and appear in court under their own names as religious organizations. Other religious organizations may be registered as "legal entities of private law," which cannot own "houses of prayer" or other property directly as religious entities but must create other corporate legal entities in order to own, bequeath, or inherit property, or to appear in court.

To be recognized as a "legal entity of private law," a religious group must be a "known religion" or dogma, defined by the courts as having a publicly taught doctrine with rites of worship that are open to the public, being nonprofit in nature, not adversely affecting public order or morality, and having a hierarchy of religious authorities. No formal mechanism existed to gain recognition as a "known religion." Recognition is granted indirectly when the Ministry of Education and Religion grants applications for permits to acquire a "house of prayer."

Some Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, Methodists, evangelicals, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, were recognized as "known religions." No new religious entities have been recognized by the Ministry of Education and Religion since 2006. Three groups following ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions had applied to the ministry for recognition. Despite the ombudsman's advice to the ministry to respond, there has been no reply. The ministry last responded to one of these groups in 2006, stating that it "would delay its formal response due to the

seriousness and the peculiarity of the matter."

Some religious groups without house of prayer permits, such as the Scientologists and followers of ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions, practiced their faith as registered nonprofit civil law organizations.

The law extends recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. The Catholic Church has sought, without success, a legal procedure that would provide recognition to its religious institutions built after 1946. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Religion established a committee to study the issue and propose a legislative solution. The Committee last met in February 2007 but produced no results as of the end of the year. Since 1999 the Catholic Church also has sought, to no avail, government recognition of Catholic canon law.

At year's end the Jehovah's Witnesses had 12 applications for house-of-prayer permits pending with the Ministry of Education and Religion, some dating from 2005. In 2006 the ombudsman recommended that the ministry send an official response as mandated by the law; however, the ministry did not respond during the year. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses community reported that in 2005 two Greek Orthodox Bishops asked a local court to repeal the Jehovah's Witnesses' house-of-prayer permits. The matter remained in the courts at year's end. Local leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses stated that their house-of-prayer applications were delayed by bureaucratic obstruction and pending construction permits.

Parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing the construction of Athens' first mosque and Islamic cultural center. In 2006 the government passed a new law providing for the establishment of a mosque, without a cultural center, in the Athens neighborhood of Votanikos. Leaders of the Athens Muslim community were satisfied with the proposed location, but in October 2007 they urged the Ministry of Education and Religion begin construction, calling the issue "one of grave importance" to the Muslims of Athens. Construction had not begun by year's end. In 2006 a Muslim Cultural Center opened in Moschato, Athens, in an abandoned factory warehouse. Funded by foreign charities and with space for 2,000 worshippers, this unofficial mosque continued to operate without a house-of-prayer permit at year's end. Other Muslims continued congregating in dozens of unofficial prayer rooms. Since the government does not recognize Muslim clerics outside of Thrace, Muslims in Athens had to travel to Thrace for official religious weddings and funerals.

Muslims are an official minority in Thrace, and the government selects three official Muslim religious leaders, or muftis, there. While part of the community accepted the officially-appointed muftis, some Muslims "elected" two different muftis, one in Xanthi and one in Rodopi, in elections in which only men were allowed to cast votes.

Discussions continued between the Jewish community of Thessaloniki and the government to find acceptable restitution for the community's cemetery, expropriated after its destruction during the Holocaust. Aristotle University, a public institution, was built on top of the expropriated cemetery soon after the end of World War II. International NGOs expressed concern that subway construction in the vicinity of the cemetery could disturb human remains. During the year the government worked with the local Jewish community to address these concerns.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they faced career limits in the military, police, firefighting force, and civil service due to their religion.

The law prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that religious rites must not disturb public order or offend moral principles. Members of missionary faiths reported police harassment and detention because of antiproselytizing laws, and officials of these faiths expressed concern that these laws remained in effect.

Police occasionally detained members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the

Jehovah's Witnesses for identity checks. While such persons were typically released after one to several hours, in January two Mormon missionaries were detained for two days on charges of proselytizing. The charges were subsequently dropped.

Orthodox religious instruction in public primary and secondary schools is mandatory, but non-Orthodox students are exempted from religious instruction. Some Thracian Muslims resident in Athens lobbied unsuccessfully for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

Some schoolbooks contained negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. Negative references to the Jehovah's Witnesses were taken out of 2007 edition schoolbooks that were being used during the year.

In Thrace the government subsidized bilingual Greek-Turkish public schools and two Koranic schools for the Muslim minority.

The law requires a religious oath for all civil servants before entering office. Persons not belonging to the Orthodox Church may take an oath in accord with their own beliefs. In February the ECHR found the country to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and Article 13 (right to an effective remedy), in the case of a lawyer who was allegedly forced to publicly state that he was not an Orthodox Christian before being permitted to take a nonreligious affirmation during the admission ceremony to the state bar. The ECHR awarded the plaintiff 2,000 euros (approximately \$3,000) in damages.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Members of non-Orthodox faiths reported incidents of societal discrimination, including warnings by Greek Orthodox bishops to their parishioners not to visit clergy or members of these faiths and requests that police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths increased societal intolerance toward their religions. With the exception of the growing Muslim population, however, most members of non-Orthodox faiths considered themselves satisfactorily integrated into society.

The Orthodox Church maintained on its Web site a list of religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Baha'is, and others, that it considered sacrilegious.

According to local leaders of the Jewish community, there were approximately 5,000 Jews living in the country. Expressions of anti-Semitism continued to occur, particularly in the extremist press. The mainstream press and public often mixed negative comments about Jews with criticism of the Israeli government. Giorgos Karatzaferis, the leader of the ultra-right political party LAOS, publicly stated that the party was not racist or anti-Semitic but frequently denied that the Holocaust occurred and accused "the pope and the Jews" of a conspiracy against the country.

There continued to be reports of vandalism of Jewish monuments during the year. In May a gravestone was broken and a large amount of broken glass was spread in the alleys and around the graves of the Athens Jewish cemetery. In August an anti-Semitic video boasting about the vandalism of the Holocaust memorial of Rhodes was aired on YouTube. In December anti-Semitic graffiti protesting Israeli military action in Gaza appeared on the walls of the synagogue in Volos. The Jewish community protested these incidents, and the government formally condemned vandalism and all expressions of anti-Semitism.

Unlike the previous year, state tourism and media agencies did not advertise the Easter tradition involving the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew." The traditional practice continued to occur in some parts of the country but was generally labeled the "burning of Judas" instead. The Jewish Community continued to protest anti-Semitic passages in the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Week liturgy. The Jewish community reported that it remained in dialogue with the Orthodox Church about the removal of these passages.

The GHM and the Central Board of Jewish Communities brought charges against the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former LAOS political party candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. In December 2007 *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted, but Plevris received a 14-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred and racial violence with his book *The Jews -The Whole Truth*. The book denied the Holocaust and called Jewish people "mortal enemies" and "subhuman." During the trial a group of neo-Nazis made Nazi salutes in the corridors of the courthouse, put up "fans of Hitler" posters, and handed out anti-Semitic leaflets. Plevris appealed the sentence; the trial had not begun by year's end.

On March 5, the misdemeanors court of Athens sentenced three journalists of *Eleftheros Kosmos* to seven-month suspended sentences for insulting Jews. The journalists appealed the sentence. In September the appeals court unanimously changed the terms from seven to five-month suspended sentences.

In September an Athens appeals court sentenced the publisher and a former columnist of weekly newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* for anti-Semitism in a March 2006 column. The columnist had criticized Thessaloniki's small Jewish community, decimated during the Holocaust, writing "thank God, less than 1,500 are left." Each defendant was given a five-month suspended sentence.

In December, after the start of Israeli military action in Gaza, the left-of-center newspaper *Eleftherotypia* printed anti-Semitic cartoons and satire, joining smaller extremist publications that compared Jews to Nazis or held them responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

The government cosponsored commemorative events in Athens and Thessaloniki in January for Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Ministry of Education and Religion distributed materials on the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on the day and informed schools of educational courses available through the Jewish Museum of Athens.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2008 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for free movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. While the government provided financial support to the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, in practice the government did not always cooperate with these organizations or follow their recommendations on protecting and assisting refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

The law permits the government to remove citizenship from persons who commit acts contrary to the country's interests for the benefit of a foreign state. While the law applies to citizens regardless of ethnicity, historically it has been enforced primarily against persons who identified themselves as ethnic "Macedonians." The government did not reveal the historical number of such cases, but it was reported to be low, and there were no reports of new

cases during the year.

Due to serious bureaucratic problems in the legalization process for immigrants, many aliens were in a semilegal status, holding expired residency permits in the process of renewal. Without current residency permits, immigrants encountered difficulty in accessing government services to which they otherwise would have been entitled. Many immigrants were subjected to summary deportation without legal process following police sweeps. The law provides for legalization of undocumented immigrants who can prove by a visa stamp or possession of a tax roll number that they entered the country before 2005. However, the ombudsman noted that the system of legalization remained disorganized and that a database of residence permits had not yet been created.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol. However, the government had not implemented, for the most part, a 1999 presidential decree that brought the law into compliance with UNHCR standards regarding asylum procedures. In practice the government provided very limited protection against the expulsion or return of persons to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened. According to Pro-Asyl, subsequent presidential decrees addressing accommodations for asylum seekers (220/2007, published in November 2007) and reforming the asylum application process (90/2008 and 96/2008, published in July) had not been implemented by year's end.

HRW reported in November that there have been few formal, legal deportations from Greece to Turkey under the 2001 Greece-Turkey readmission protocol. According to the HRW report, since 2002 Greece has requested the readmission of tens of thousands of aliens, but Turkey has only accepted several thousand cases. Greek officials expressed concern that the protocol was not working, and the high number of migrants crossing into the country from Turkey strained social services.

Local and international entities, including the UNHCR, the Greek Council for Refugees, the ombudsman for human rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, AI, HRW, and Pro-Asyl expressed concern that very few applicants were granted asylum and potential asylum seekers, including minors, were at risk of expulsion.

In November HRW released a report regarding the detention of Iraqi and other asylum seekers in poor, overcrowded conditions as well as the forced expulsion of Iraqi asylum seekers to Turkey. The report criticized the "inhuman and degrading treatment" of these individuals while in detention, particularly at the detention centers in Lesbos, Chios, and Petrou Ralli. HRW also alleged that Greece, by summarily expelling Iraqi migrants to Turkey, which would return them directly to Iraq, was engaging in the practice of expelling or returning persons to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened. The report also criticized the Coast Guard for intentionally puncturing seaborne migrants' inflatable boats and for pushing them back into Turkish territorial waters.

In December HRW reported on the country's "systematic failure" to protect unaccompanied migrant children, alleging that minors were detained in the same cells as adults, age and vulnerability assessment procedures were inadequate, child-trafficking victims were not identified properly, and unaccompanied minors faced severe problems in applying for asylum. The law requires that unaccompanied migrant minors be provided with a temporary guardian, regardless of whether the child has applied for asylum. In practice the government seldom provided a guardian or safe accommodation for migrant children, leaving minors vulnerable to homelessness and labor exploitation. HRW estimated that 1,000 unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children entered the country during the year.

The ombudsman continued to point out inadequacies in laws for detaining and deporting underage foreign nationals, including asylum seekers, and a lack of infrastructure and services for handling juvenile detainees who

tried to enter the country illegally or sought asylum.

In February Norway stopped returning refugees and asylum seekers to the country under the Dublin II Regulation after receiving information from Greek NGOs, and testimonies from asylum seekers, that returnees were mistreated and that their rights infringed upon in Greece. By May Sweden and the Netherlands had also suspended the return of certain asylum seekers.

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) reported in April that the rights of asylum seekers were routinely violated. ECRE publicized stories of asylum seekers who had suffered police violence.

During the year both the UNHCR and HRW called on the government to refrain from returning asylum seekers to the country under the Dublin II Regulation until further notice. The UNHCR noted that, although the country had taken a number of steps to improve its asylum practices, a substantial number of asylum seekers continued to face serious challenges in accessing and enjoying effective protection. Essential procedural safeguards were not guaranteed throughout the process of determining whether candidates were entitled to refugee status, at both the first-instance and appeals levels, to the detriment of asylum seekers. The UNHCR also highlighted the lack of interpreters and legal aid, undue hardships in the hearing and adjudication of claims, problematic conditions and limited capacity in reception centers, and excessively long waiting periods for appeals decisions. As of May the country had only 11 asylum officers.

The ombudsman also noted that the overall asylum application process remained a problem, primarily due to selective acceptance and processing procedures for asylum applications at police stations throughout the country. According to UNHCR, from January to October asylum seekers filed 16,676 applications at the first instance and 11,144 at the appeals level. The government reviewed 21,626 cases and 3,043 appeals during this period. At the first-instance level, only six persons (0.02 percent) received refugee status, while at the appeals level 344 persons (11.3 percent) were granted refugee status. An additional 25 persons were granted special humanitarian status.

Conditions for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers detained by authorities were generally unsatisfactory. NGOs and international organizations continued to criticize detention procedures and facilities for refugees and asylum seekers as inadequate. During the year the ombudsman alleged that police detained all refugees and migrants on their arrival on the islands, including minors. All new arrivals, without exception, were placed under a deportation order without having the chance to first file for asylum, and detention was continued even if an asylum application had been submitted. The ombudsman noted that new arrivals were routinely held to the end of the maximum detention period.

The UNHCR, AI, the ombudsman for human rights, and MSF expressed concern over the country's asylum policy and practices. Specific problems included unacceptable living conditions; lack of permanent reception facilities with decent living conditions; the use of ad hoc facilities (primarily on the islands, when a boatload of refugees arrived); underdeveloped systems to provide for refugee welfare; insufficient counseling to assist in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers; and a lack of appropriate facilities for unaccompanied minors who were potential asylum seekers.

The CPT reported in February that conditions in most of the migrant detention centers it visited in 2007 were unsatisfactory. The CPT reported that the Petrou Ralli, Piraeus, Vrissika, and Aspropyrgos migrant detention centers were overcrowded, in a poor state of repair, had unhygienic conditions, lacked access to outdoor exercise space, and provided limited access to medical care. The CPT also found that conditions for migrants in border police detention centers were unacceptable, even for short periods of stay. Border police detention centers in Isaakio and Heo Himoni had poor access to natural light and ventilation, detainees were provided dirty blankets and slept on the floor, and cells were regularly flooded. The CPT described the conditions at the Kiprinos border police detention

center as "inhuman and degrading" due to extreme overcrowding and a lack of access to common space.

The UNHCR representative to Greece stated in 2007 that some progress had been made on Lesbos and that much progress had occurred in Samos in providing information, legal counseling, and medical care to undocumented immigrants and in registering their asylum claims. During the year the UNHCR representative and local human rights advocates criticized the conditions of the detention centers on Lesbos, Patmos, and other Aegean islands, where detainees had no access to a yard and where overcrowding was a serious problem.

During the year the UNHCR released a study of the handling of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the country and requested that the asylum applications of separated children be examined immediately, that new reception centers be created, and that the principle of guardianship in the best interests of the children be strengthened.

In February the UNHCR expressed concern over the police's temporary dismantling of a makeshift camp in Patras, where asylum seekers and other migrants, mainly from Afghanistan and including about 250 unaccompanied minors, had been residing for years. The UNHCR urged the government to address the issue while protecting human rights, the right to asylum, public health and social concerns of the host society, the well-being of children, and combating human smuggling.

In May the MSF reported irregular and inefficient medical care, lack of adequate personnel, unacceptable living conditions, lack of special measures for vulnerable groups, and lack of interpreters in all detention centers it visited in the Aegean islands.

During the year the CPT again reported that the short-term detention and transit facility at Petrou-Ralli for persons awaiting deportation was unsuitable for stays over two days. However, in practice persons were confined for up to three months in cells that contained up to eight persons with cement beds and limited access to showers and exercise. The CPT noted that the facility's design was extremely poor and that it lacked any communal spaces.

In its annual report, AI found that protection of refugees remained minimal, that the government failed to allow asylum seekers access to the country, continued to return them to their countries of origin without legal aid or having access to asylum procedures, that detention of asylum seekers, including children, continued, and that detention conditions continued to be unhygienic and overcrowded.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship is derived from one's parents and not by birth within the country's territory. UNHCR data indicated that there were 108 stateless persons in the country at the end of 2007. The former Ministry of the Interior reported to parliament in 2005 that 46,638 Muslims from Thrace and the Dodecanese islands lost their citizenship when they left the country from 1955-98. The law that permitted this divestment of citizenship was repealed in 1998, and these "stateless" residents are eligible to recover their citizenship as long as they live in the country. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by 2005 there were 25 to 30 persons in possession of government-issued identification documents characterizing them as "stateless." The ministry had no updated figures on stateless persons by year's end.

In 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that all of the stateless persons had applications pending for citizenship through naturalization. In March 2007 the ombudsman noted that delays in processing applications for recovering citizenship were "excessive and unjustified." According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order had made no decisions on the applications by year's end. Stateless residents were denied access to state benefits such as social security, medical care, and pensions.

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

The law provides citizens 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.

Elections and Political Participation

The country held parliamentary elections in September 2007; the elections were considered free and fair. Five parties passed the 3 percent threshold for representation in parliament. Opposition parties functioned freely and had broad access to the media.

Romani representatives reported that local authorities often deprived Roma of the right to vote by refusing to register them. Many Roma had difficulty meeting the municipal residency requirements to register to vote.

According to the law, voting is mandatory for citizens over age 18; however, there are many conditions under which citizens may be exempted, and the government did not apply a penalty for not voting.

There were 49 women in the 300-seat parliament and two women in the 17-member cabinet. A quota system requires 30 percent of all local government candidates to be women. At the three high courts, 14 of 61 council-of-state justices were women, as were 28 of 59 supreme administrative court justices, and 3 of the 62 Supreme Court justices.

There were two members of the Muslim minority in the 300-seat parliament; there were no minority members in the cabinet.

A government-appointed regional administrator of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has statutory responsibility for the oversight of rights provided to the Muslim minority in Thrace, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs retained an important advisory role.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's worldwide governance indicators reflected that corruption was a serious problem.

NGOs and media reported that the government insufficiently prioritized anticorruption efforts. Mutual accusations of corruption between political parties were a daily staple of political life. Prime Minister Karamanlis made anticorruption a key element of his party's program, and the government pursued an in-depth investigation into judicial corruption and took steps to trace and apprehend corrupt tax collectors and law enforcement officers. Despite these efforts, major corruption cases continued to surface throughout the year.

In September a former minister and personal aide of the prime minister was convicted and given a one-year suspended prison sentence for interceding with judicial authorities on behalf of one of his constituents, who was illegally growing hashish. The former minister appealed his sentence. In December an appeals court gave him a five-month sentence, suspended for three years.

Two cabinet ministers resigned during the year amid allegations of involvement in a controversial property swap between Vatopedi, a Mount Athos monastery, and the Hellenic Public Real Estate Corporation.

In 2005 the former general director/acting consul at the Greek Consulate in Kyiv, the consulate's messenger, three

foreign employees, and a policeman in Thessaloniki were criminally charged for allegedly cooperating in issuing approximately 2,500 illegal tourist visas to Ukrainian citizens for \$200,000. The case was tried in Thessaloniki in April 2007. The diplomat was sentenced to 21 years in prison. A consular employee received a sentence of 19 years, and a female Russian accomplice based in Greece received nine years. The diplomat's partner and a policeman were also tried but acquitted on all counts. The convicted parties appealed the decision but remained in prison at year's end. The date of the appeals trial had not yet been determined at year's end.

There are income disclosure laws for high-ranking public officials and members of parliament.

The constitution provides for the right of access to government-held information, and in practice the government granted access to citizens and noncitizens alike, including foreign media.

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 government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative with some NGOs. However, the ombudsman for human rights and the GHM characterized the government-NGO relationship as poor. The ombudsman charged that the government avoided cooperating with NGOs, who "could remedy the shortcomings of the administration."

Despite calls from the UN special rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography for the government to appoint a lead person on children's issues, the government failed to do so. There were no improvements to the institutional capacity for protecting unaccompanied minors or street children.

GHM and other NGOs called for the government to improve the living conditions of Roma and give Romani children alternatives to street work and prostitution. However, the problem remained largely unaddressed except in Thrace and in Athens, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local NGOs implemented measures to increase school attendance by Romani children. The government has not taken steps to create an advisory board to coordinate children's policies or to create a joint Greek-Albanian commission to investigate "disappearances" from a children's institution between 1998 and 2003.

The law provides for an independent ombudsman for human rights. Although the Ministry of Justice has denied the ombudsman access to prisons since 2005, the ombudsman's office otherwise provided an effective means for citizens to address human rights and religious freedom problems. While it could not inspect prisons, the office was granted adequate resources to perform its other functions, which included mediating between private individuals and public administration and defending and promoting children's rights.

There were five deputy ombudsmen who dealt respectively with human rights, children's rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality of life. The Department of Human Rights received complaints during the year regarding the government's handling of residence and work provisions for immigrants, overcrowding in prisons and detention centers for illegal aliens, unjustified procedural difficulties in acquiring citizenship, excessive and unjustified delays in processing applications by Muslims from Thrace to recover citizenship lost under pre-1998 laws, arbitrary acceptance or denial of asylum seekers' applications, discrimination against aliens, and police brutality.

The government-funded National Commission for Human Rights is an autonomous human rights body. The commission is the government's advisory body on the protection of human rights. During the year it produced reports on health treatment for illegal immigrants, problems in the asylum process, the plight of aliens trying to

enter the country via the Aegean Sea and the practices of the Coast Guard, inmates' rights, and conditions in prisons.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status; however, the government did not protect these rights consistently in practice. Violence against women and children, trafficking in persons, and discrimination against homosexuals and ethnic minorities, particularly Roma and undocumented migrants, were problems.

Women

Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime. Conviction rates for rape were low for first-time offenders, but sentences were harsh for repeat offenders. According to government statistics, there were 150 rape or attempted rape cases reported in the first six months of the year, and 133 rape suspects were arrested. In 2007, 249 rapes and attempted rapes were reported. In 2006 an academic researcher estimated that approximately 4,500 rapes occurred annually in the country, while government statistics from that year showed that 270, or 6 percent of the academic estimate, were actually reported to police. Of those reported rapes, 183 resulted in an arrest. Of the 47 rape cases that reached court, 20 resulted in conviction.

Medical, psychological, social, and legal support from the government and NGOs were usually available to rape victims.

Domestic violence, including spousal abuse, continued to be a problem. The law provides for prosecution by force of law, without the need for a victim to press charges, for all domestic violence crimes. Penalties range from two to 10 years' imprisonment, depending on the gravity of the crime.

The General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes (GSES), an independent government agency, estimated that only 6 to 10 percent of domestic violence victims contacted the police, and only a small fraction of those cases reached trial. Despite training efforts, the GSES reported that police tended to discourage women from pursuing domestic violence charges, encouraging them instead to undertake reconciliation efforts, and courts were lenient when dealing with domestic violence cases. Police stations generally had a manual on how police should treat victims of domestic violence. The GSES, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order, trained police on working with domestic violence victims.

In September a Greek-Spanish woman alleged that police in Eressos, Lesbos, threatened and discouraged her from filing charges against a local man who had beaten her. The victim alleged that the police officers at the station were friends of the perpetrator and were covering for him.

The GSES provided counseling and assistance to domestic violence victims. Two GSES shelters for battered women and their children, in Athens and Piraeus, offered services including legal and psychological help. The GSES operated a 24-hour emergency telephone hot line for abused women. A unit of the Ministry of Health and Welfare that operated a hot line providing referrals and psychological counseling closed early in the year due to lack of funds. The municipality of Athens, the Greek Orthodox Church, and various NGOs operated shelters for victims of domestic violence.

Prostitution is legal at the age of 18. Persons engaged in prostitution must register at the local prefecture and carry a medical card that is updated every two weeks. It was estimated that fewer than 1,000 women were legally employed as prostitutes and approximately 20,000 women, most of foreign origin, were engaged in illegal

prostitution. According to academics, many illegal prostitutes may be trafficking victims. While there were reports that prostitutes were abused and subjected to violence and harassment by pimps and clients, there were no reports that they were specifically targeted for abuse by the police.

The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for penalties ranging from two months' to five years' imprisonment. However, labor unions reported that lawsuits for sexual harassment were very rare. The Center for Research on Gender Equality Issues reported that the vast majority of women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace quit their jobs and did not file charges. The center estimated that 30-50 percent of working women and 10 percent of working men had experienced sexual harassment at their workplace.

Muslim women in Thrace have inferior rights to men under family law, property law, and in the judicial system, since these issues are resolved under Shari'a (Muslim religious) law interpreted by muftis. The government recognizes Shari'a as the law regulating the family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace, and thus the first instance courts in Thrace routinely ratified the muftis' decisions.

In an unprecedented March case, a court of first instance in Rodopi Prefecture refused to ratify a mufti's decision that awarded a woman only a small share of her parental inheritance, instead of the one-half share provided by the law. The court held that Greek and European law should prevail over Shari'a law. The court stated that the use of Shari'a should not deprive the country's Muslim women of their rights and should not be applied if it violated the basic principles of the constitution regarding the equality of the sexes and equality before the law. A final court decision regarding the division of property between the woman and her brother had not been delivered by year's end.

The National Commission for Human Rights has advised the government to limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and to stop recognizing Shari'a law, because it could restrict the civic rights of citizens. Muslim female activists claimed that, because all Muslim women in Thrace were married under Shari'a, they were therefore obliged to acquire mufti consent to obtain a divorce. These decisions were based on interpretations of Shari'a law that do not exist in written form and therefore would not be able to be appealed. Still, the courts routinely ratified such mufti decisions.

Apart from the Muslim minority in Thrace, women have rights equal to those of men, and equality is stipulated by the constitution.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work; however, according to the last official statistics (collected in 2005), women's pay was 81 percent of men's pay. Although relatively few occupied senior positions, women continued to enter traditionally male-dominated professions such as law and medicine in larger numbers. Women were underrepresented in labor union leadership.

Children

The government was not consistently committed to children's rights and welfare. Romani children continued to face social exclusion and discrimination in education and lacked access to social services. Unaccompanied migrant children were detained in the same cells as adults, lacked safe accommodations and legal guardians, and were vulnerable to homelessness and labor exploitation. Corporal punishment of children is prohibited by law.

The government does not issue birth certificates for children born in the country to immigrant parents without citizenship. The ombudsman for human rights urged the government to grant citizenship to all children who were born and raised in the country and to accept them for all educational, social security, and social protection-related services. Without a birth certificate or a long-term residence permit, immigrant children faced difficulties registering

for school. According to the law, noncitizen children must wait until age 18 to apply for long-term residence permits. In December the parliament passed a new law giving immigrant children born in the country the right to apply for long-term residence permits.

While the law provides free and compulsory education for a minimum of nine years, noncompliance was a significant problem in the Romani community. Research conducted by the Aghlaia Kyriakou state hospital showed that 63 percent of Romani children did not attend school. The Pedagogical University of Thessaloniki reported that less than 10 percent of Romani children in northern Greece finished the nine years of compulsory education and only 3 percent graduated from high school. The GHM reported in April that 90 percent of Romani children were illiterate.

There were continuing reports of non-Romani parents withdrawing their children from schools attended by Romani children and attempting to prevent Romani children from studying at the same schools that their children attended. A segregated Romani-only school in Psari, Apropyrgos, was destroyed twice within a year, in April 2007 and in January, and the perpetrators had not been found by year's end.

In June the ECHR ruled against Greece for maintaining a segregated school in Psari, Aspropyrgos, since 2005. The ruling came after the GHM filed an application on behalf of 11 Romani parents and 18 children. The ECHR found that the refusal of education authorities to enroll the Romani children in the local elementary school, and their subsequent placement in a separate annex school attended only by Roma, violated prohibitions against discrimination and denied Romani children their right to education.

Violence against children was a problem, particularly against street children and undocumented migrant children. The law prohibits the mistreatment of children and sets penalties for violators, and the government generally enforced these provisions effectively. However, government-run institutions were understaffed, and NGOs complained that they did not have positions for all children in need of alternative placement. Welfare laws provide for treatment and prevention programs for abused and neglected children as well as alternative family care or institutional placement for those in need of it. However, the deputy ombudsman for children's rights reported during the year that the system for children's welfare and protection was deficient overall and did not cover increasing needs. In particular, social services were not appropriately staffed to face serious family problems, and welfare allowances and support to single-parent families were insufficient. In addition the deputy ombudsman noted that prosecutors for minors, who should by law take measures to protect children in problematic situations, were overloaded with other duties. Child-protection institutions were understaffed, lacked certification, and did not have sufficient qualified staff to provide care to abused, refugee, or drug-abusing children. Foster care systems were not adequately implemented, and adoption procedures continued to take several years.

Child marriage was common within the Romani community, and there were limited numbers of marriages of persons under 18 among the Muslim minority in Thrace and Athens. In 2006 the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights and the UN special rapporteur reported that they were informed of cases of both early marriages and marriages-by-proxy. The state-appointed muftis, who may apply Shari'a law in family matters, noted that they did not allow the marriage of children under age 15. The government has youth centers, parent counseling, and programs targeted at Romani and Muslim communities that address poverty and the lack of education, two factors believed to contribute to child marriage.

In January legislation prohibiting the possession and circulation of child pornography was passed. Previously, only the sale or purchase of such materials was prohibited.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local NGOs, the majority of street children (often indigenous Roma or Albanian Roma) were exploited by family members, who forced them to work in the streets, begging or

selling small items. The government took insufficient steps to prevent this form of child exploitation. While no nationwide statistics were available at year's end, in December, the NGO ARSIS estimated that Thessaloniki, the country's second-largest city, had over 300 street children.

Conditions for undocumented-immigrant and asylum-seeking children were particularly harsh. In June, 103 unaccompanied minors, including Somali girls from eight to 12 years old and boys from 12-18 years old, were incarcerated with adults on Lesbos. In May, 121 unaccompanied minors held in a small hotel and rented hall in Leros Island staged rolling hunger strikes to protest their poor detention conditions. Following public outcry over these incidents, media reported that local NGOs provided aid to these minors.

In December HRW reported on the country's "systematic failure" to protect unaccompanied migrant children, alleging that minors were detained in the same cells as adults, age and vulnerability assessment procedures were inadequate, child trafficking victims were not identified properly, unaccompanied minors faced severe problems in applying for asylum. The law requires that unaccompanied migrant minors be provided with a temporary guardian, regardless of whether the child has applied for asylum. In practice the government seldom provided a guardian or safe accommodation for children, leaving minors vulnerable to homelessness and labor exploitation. HRW estimated that 1,000 unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children entered the country during the year.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons; however, significant numbers of women and children and smaller numbers of men were trafficked to and within the country for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Sectors involving forced labor included agricultural work, street vending, and forced begging.

According to NGO estimates, there were 13,000-14,000 trafficking victims in the country at any given time. Major countries of origin for trafficking victims included Nigeria, Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, Romania, and Belarus. Women from many other countries were trafficked to the country and, in some cases, were reportedly trafficked on to Italy and other European Union countries as well as to the Middle East. Women and children typically arrived as "tourists" or illegal immigrants and were lured into prostitution by club owners who threatened them with deportation.

NGOs reported a decrease in the number of Albanian children trafficked into the country for the third consecutive year. However, there were reports that Albanian Romani children continued to be trafficked for forced begging and stealing. In July the parliament ratified a protocol with Albania on the repatriation of Albanian children who were victims of child trafficking.

The law considers trafficking in persons a criminal offense and provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines of 10,000-50,000 euros (approximately \$15,000-\$75,000) for convicted traffickers. Penalties are harsher for traffickers of children. The government continued to investigate cases of trafficking and secured convictions for traffickers.

In 2007 police conducted 42 trafficking investigations (30 sexual exploitation cases, 11 labor exploitation cases, and one illegal adoption), down from 70 in 2006. They brought charges against 121 suspected traffickers, down from 206 arrests in 2006. Twenty-five defendants (in nine separate cases) were convicted of trafficking-related charges, while three were acquitted. Sentences imposed on convicted traffickers remained lenient; moreover, the majority of convicted traffickers remained free on bail for five to six years while their convictions were appealed. The Ministry of Justice continued to lack effective databases, hindering its ability to provide and manage information on convictions and sentencing, especially in trafficking cases.

During the year the government participated in international investigations in cooperation with EUROPOL, INTERPOL, and the Southern European Cooperative Initiative. The Ministry of the Interior and Public Order continued working on a police action plan for regional antitrafficking cooperation.

Some police officers and diplomats were reportedly involved in trafficking rings or accepted bribes from traffickers, including from organized crime networks. The police Bureau of Internal Affairs investigated charges of police involvement in trafficking cases. In 2007 charges were filed against three police officers, two of them senior, relating to trafficking. By year's end no trial date had been set.

In April 2007 Greek diplomats assigned to Ukraine were tried in Thessaloniki for issuing visas, with little documentary evidence and no personal interviews, to women subsequently identified as trafficking victims. One diplomat received a 21-year sentence, and a consular employee received a 19-year sentence. A female accomplice, a Russian citizen living in Greece, received a nine-year sentence. The diplomat's spouse and a policeman were acquitted. The convicted parties appealed the decision, but at year's end they remained in jail waiting for their appeals to be heard.

While the immigration law provides for a "reflection period" for trafficking victims facing deportation, the screening and referral process did not adequately identify and protect most vulnerable victims, especially children. Some trafficking victims, including minors, were prosecuted for immigration violations, sometimes alongside their traffickers. A few trafficking victims and NGOs reported that inadequate police protection for victims who were witnesses in trials meant that those victims lived in constant fear of their traffickers. A few victims were provided with the reflection period and testified against their traffickers. One hundred trafficking victims were identified by authorities in 2007, an increase over the 83 victims identified in 2006 but still below the 137 victims identified in 2005.

Police continued to detain trafficking victims who were minors as criminals or to repatriate them without ensuring proper reception by authorities in their home countries.

During the year the government continued training programs for prosecutors and public administration officers, including social workers, psychologists, nurses, police personnel, and justices. The government also conducted training programs in conjunction with international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the International Organization for Migration.

The State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at www.state.gov/g/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of other government services, and the government effectively enforced these provisions. The law mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities; however, authorities enforced this law poorly. During the year rapporteurs to a special parliamentary committee on persons with disabilities reported that the lack of accessibility forced such persons to stay home and led to serious social exclusion.

Only 5 percent of public buildings were fully accessible to persons with disabilities; most buildings with special ramps did not have accessible elevators or lavatories. The deputy ombudsman for social welfare handled complaints related to persons with special needs, especially those related to employment, social security, and transportation.

The Ministry of Welfare estimated during the year that there were approximately 180,000 children with special educational needs. The Teachers' Associations estimated that only 18,500 of these children attended primary school

and that, of this number, only 10 percent would go on to attend secondary school, due either to a lack of local special education schools or a lack of accessibility. The National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities reported in February 2007 that the educational system for persons with disabilities fostered discrimination and social exclusion and that, as a consequence, 90 percent of children with disabilities were excluded from the mandatory nine years of education. The deputy ombudsman for children's rights and the NGO Confederation of the Disabled reiterated during the year that education was not available for persons with serious disabilities and that many persons with disabilities were either forced to leave school due to lack of accessibility or were receiving a low quality education at the special education schools. The confederation stated that, of the 10 universities in Athens, only two were accessible to persons with disabilities.

In June members of a special parliamentary committee for persons with disabilities said that unemployment of persons with disabilities, estimated to be approximately 80 percent, was the greatest social problem these persons faced.

The law states that individuals may be confined in mental hospitals only under a court order. In May 2007 the ombudsman for human rights reported that 94 percent of persons confined in mental hospitals were there under a prosecutor's order but that, in 84 percent of these cases, the decision to confine the patient was not supported by a corresponding court decision. As a result, the rights of mentally ill persons were not effectively protected. The ombudsman further found that 97 percent of mentally ill persons had been transferred to mental hospitals by police, sometimes handcuffed and escorted as "dangerous persons" rather than as patients.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination, including systematic police abuse; mistreatment while in police custody; regular raids and searches of Romani neighborhoods for criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons; limited access to education and segregated schooling; forced illegal evictions; demolitions of dwellings (which in many cases were shacks made of cardboard, plastic sheets, and corrugated tin on the edge of city dumps); and a lack of running water, electricity, or waste removal.

During the year AI criticized the government for its treatment of Roma, stating that the Romani community continued suffering forced evictions and home demolitions and that Roma faced discrimination and racist attacks from both representatives of local administrations and society in general. Other international human rights organizations and entities, including the European Committee of Social Rights, the International Helsinki Federation, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the UN special rapporteur, and the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, identified numerous shortcomings in government policies regarding the Romani community, including the failure to provide a sufficient number of dwellings for settled Roma or camps for Roma who follow an itinerant lifestyle; systematic eviction of Roma from sites or dwellings; segregation of Roma into substandard housing that lacked water, sanitation, and other basic services; denial of access to education for Romani children; and denial of access to health and social programs.

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 in the country at year's end. Local and international NGOs charged that the enforced separation of Romani settlements from other inhabited areas contravened the country's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

There were frequent police raids on Romani settlements and reports of harsh treatment of them by police. The ombudsman held a conference on Roma issues in December 2007 at which he highlighted that, in virtually all categories, Roma were the most marginalized group in society. He criticized the government and society as

apathetic and indifferent toward measures that would support the Romani community, particularly in connection with housing and access to education. Roma continued to face problems in registering for an identity card in municipalities, without which they could not access basic civic opportunities such as voting, contributing to social security, or obtaining marriage, commercial, or driver's licenses, or a mortgage. The ombudsman criticized the lack of a central authority to coordinate action and to monitor government initiatives to tackle long-standing Romani problems.

In April, on International Roma Day, the ombudsman noted that society's tolerance of the desperate living conditions of the Roma constituted degrading treatment. The GHM reported that the situation for the Roma had worsened since 2007 and the National Commission for Human Rights said that the unaddressed civil rights problems facing the Roma were dimming hopes for Romani integration into, and coexistence with, the rest of society.

In April an academic reported that life expectancy for Roma was 55 years (compared to 79 for the rest of the population), 90 percent of Romani children were not vaccinated, the rate of hepatitis B among Roma was three times higher than the rest of the population, and that the rate of incarceration for Roma was seven times higher than that of the general population.

Also in April a truck unloading garbage in the Aspropyrgos dump killed a pregnant 17-year-old Romanian Romani teenager foraging for food.

Local authorities continued to harass and threaten to evict Roma from their camps or other dwellings. In April the International Center for the Legal Protection of Human Rights, in partnership with the GHM, filed a complaint against Greece with the European Committee of Social Rights. The complaint detailed serious and widespread violations of the Romani community's right to housing.

In July the Misdemeanors Court of Athens convicted three employees of the extreme right-wing weekly newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* to seven-month suspended sentences for racist articles against the Roma.

Government ministries continued projects to address the chronic problems of the Romani community, including training courses for civil servants, police, and teachers to increase their sensitivity to Romani problems; the development of teaching materials for Romani children; the establishment of youth centers in areas close to Romani communities; and the deployment of mobile health units and community social workers to address the needs of itinerant Roma. However, these programs reportedly did not always reach the intended target communities or were of limited effectiveness. Roma complained that government-sponsored housing loans, for amounts up to 60,000 euros (approximately \$90,000), were insufficient for purchasing housing, and that the loan application process was too slow. The government blamed incomplete applications for loan delays.

Neo-Nazi groups reportedly attacked immigrants during the year. Five Pakistanis were injured and one was hospitalized at an attack in November 2007 on a western Athens house rented by Pakistani immigrant workers. The Greek-speaking neo-Nazi skinheads entered the house after kicking and smashing doors and windows. A similar attack took place in January, but without injuries. Police did not find the perpetrators and stated that they were investigating the allegations. No results were announced by year's end.

Albanian immigrants, who made up approximately 5-7 percent of the population, faced widespread societal discrimination, although Albanian community representatives said that this was slowly decreasing over time. Immigrants accused police of physical, verbal, and other mistreatment. They also reported the confiscation and destruction of personal documents, particularly during police sweeps to apprehend undocumented immigrants. According to AI, the GHM, and the ombudsman, the police rejected complaints by Albanians of mistreatment as

unfounded, even when the complaints were supported by documents such as certificates from state hospitals concerning recent injuries, issued shortly after the complainants' release from police stations.

Community leaders reported that it was difficult for ethnic Albanians and other immigrants to be granted citizenship, even after all objective citizenship requirements had been met. Government procedures for granting citizenship are confidential, and the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order is not obliged to explain the reasons for rejecting an application. Immigrant community leaders noted that the ministry regularly rejected the applications of immigrants who believed that they met all citizenship criteria. Applying for citizenship was further discouraged by the 1,500 euro (approximately \$2,100) nonrefundable application fee. During the year the ombudsman noted that delays in citizenship procedures were excessive and unjustified. The ombudsman reported that few applications for citizenship were accepted by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order and that many applications were pending for years, even if the applicants met all requirements.

A number of Greek citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks (Slavic-speaking Muslims), Vlachs (a Balkan minority group speaking a dialect of Romanian), Roma, Arvanites (Orthodox Christians who speak a dialect of Albanian), or Macedonians. Some members of these groups sought to be officially identified as "minorities" or "linguistic minorities." The government considers the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne as providing the exclusive definition of minorities in the country and defines the rights they have as a group. In accordance with this view, the government recognizes only a "Muslim minority." The government does not confer official status on any indigenous ethnic groups, nor does it recognize "ethnic minority" or "linguistic minority" as legal terms. However, the government affirmed an individual right of self-identification.

Many 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*. Associations with either term in their name were denied official recognition. To most ethnic Greeks, the words *Tourkos* and *Tourkikos* connote Turkish identity or loyalties, and many ethnic Greeks objected to their use by Greek citizens of Turkish origin.

Some members of the Pomak community claimed they were pressured by members of the Turkish-speaking community to deny the existence of a Pomak identity as separate from a Turkish identity. Media in Thessaloniki reported in October that two editors of *Millet*, a local paper published in Turkish, were given 12-month suspended sentences for inciting hatred against the Pomak community.

The government did not recognize the existence of a Slavic dialect, called "Macedonian" by its speakers, spoken in the northwestern area of the country. A small number of Slavic speakers insisted on self-identifying as "Macedonian," a designation that generated strong opposition from other Greeks. These Slavic speakers claimed that the government pursued a policy designed to discourage the use of their language. Government officials and the courts denied requests by Slavic groups to identify themselves using the term "Macedonian," stating that approximately 2.2 million ethnic (and linguistically) Greek citizens also use the term "Macedonian" to identify themselves.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The NGO Greek Homosexual Community (EOK) alleged that police often abused and harassed homosexuals and transvestites and subjected them to arbitrary identity checks and bodily searches in public places.

There were no reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides that all workers, with the exception of members of the military services, have the right to form and join independent unions of their choice without any previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers exercised this right. Approximately 30 percent of the total labor force was unionized. There were no unionized agricultural employees. The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government protected this right in practice.

The law provides for the right to strike, and workers in the private sector and in public corporations exercised this right in practice. Police have the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike. There are some legal restrictions on strikes, including a mandatory notice period of four days for public utilities and 24 hours for the private sector. The law mandates minimum staff levels (as determined by management) during strikes affecting public services. Courts may declare a strike illegal; however, such decisions were seldom enforced. Unions complained that this judicial power deterred some of their members from participating in strikes. Courts declared some strikes (of transportation workers, air traffic controllers, garbage collectors, customs employees, and others) illegal during the year for reasons such as the failure of the union to give adequate advance notice of the strike or the introduction of new demands by a union during the course of the strike, but no workers were prosecuted for striking.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law generally provides for the right to bargain collectively in the private sector and in public corporations, and unions exercised this right freely. No antiunion discrimination was reported during the year.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that women, children, and occasionally men were trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation or labor.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law protects children from exploitation in the workplace and prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, the government did not adequately protect children, including Roma, who were trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation as well as for labor, such as begging on the street.

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 the cinema. These limits were enforced by occasional spot checks and were generally observed. Families who engaged in agriculture, food service, and merchandising were often assisted by younger family members on at least a part-time basis.

Child labor was a problem, although international and local observers agreed that the number of working children had decreased in recent years. A number of children begged or sold small items in the streets. The government and NGOs reported that the majority of beggars were either indigenous or Albanian Roma. Local children's advocates estimated that a large number of the 150,000 children under 18 years of age who dropped out of school each year ended up in the labor market, often in poorly- paid and arduous positions. Jobs for dropouts included washing cars, pumping gas, construction, and low-level service sector employment.

In December HRW reported that unaccompanied migrant children were particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation. These minors worked mainly in the agriculture, construction, and garment-manufacturing sectors, all in situations

that violated the law. Farm and construction jobs, in particular, were reported to be hazardous to the children's health. All of the children that HRW interviewed were paid below the minimum wage and many worked 12 hours or more per day.

There were reports that children from Albania were trafficked and forced to beg; however, antitrafficking NGOs reported a decrease in trafficking as more Albanian parents entered the country legally with their children. Some parents forced their children to beg for money or used their children to elicit sympathy while begging for money.

The labor inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor legislation; however, trade unions alleged that enforcement was inadequate due to serious labor inspectorate understaffing.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage of 31 euros (approximately \$47) per day and 680 euros (\$1,020) per month provided a decent standard of living for a worker with a family. Wages were officially the same for local and foreign workers, but there were reports of undocumented foreign workers being exploited by employers who paid low wages and made no social security contributions.

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 one month per year, and sets limits on the amount of overtime worked. Premium pay and authorization by the Ministry of Employment is required by law for overtime work. The labor inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor legislation; however, trade unions alleged that enforcement was inadequate, especially in the construction and public works sectors, due to inadequate inspectorate staffing.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety. The Greek General Confederation of Labor 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 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 five days if they see safety or health hazards that they believe represent an imminent danger to workers.