

Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the review of Greece

Submitted to: Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Submitted by: Partners for Transparency (granted consultative status with the ECOSOC)

Introduction

Greece ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in June 1970, thus is obliged to take all policy and legislative measures and procedures to implement the provisions of the convention. In fact, Greece has taken legally commendable steps to adapt its national legislations to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Currently, the Greek law embrace several articles and texts prohibiting all forms of racial discrimination and recognizing the enjoyment by all individuals of all fundamental human rights without discrimination based on race, origin, belief, color or sex.

However, Partners foundation noticed that a wide spectrum of individuals in Greece, including refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, Roma, and other racial minorities, are subjected to various forms of discrimination and inequality in the enjoyment of all fundamental human rights, as well as grave human rights violations of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

In light of the above, Partners for Transparency in this report provides detailed observations on the extent of Greece's compliance with the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on the occasion of its review before the CERD at its 114th session, through focusing on the convention's most important articles covering certain human rights issues of particular concern to it, which we will address in some detail as follows:

Racial violence and racial hate crimes

Greece is obliged, under item 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial discrimination, not to perform any act or practice of racial discrimination, and to take all appropriate means and policies to eliminate racial discrimination. In this context, Greece has taken significant steps over the previous years to combat racism and intolerance through adopting several national strategies and action plans, including, for example, the National Action Plan against Racism and Intolerance adopted by the Greek Government between 2020 and 2023. This plan sought to address all forms of racism, including racist, racial, religious, and sexual discrimination, as well as to raise

awareness of the principle of equal treatment, ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals in Greece without discrimination on any ground.¹

In addition to the National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma covering the period 2021-2030, aiming at addressing the multiple fears and forms of exclusion faced by Roma communities in Greece through focusing on key areas as protection, housing, medical care, education and employment.²

However, racial violence and racial hate crimes against refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, Roma and other racial and ethnic minority communities remain a growing concern in Greece. In this regard, Partners Foundation reviewed with concern the information contained in paragraphs 29 and 30 of the State party's report, which indicated that incidents of racial violence had increased over the past years, particularly against refugees and migrants in residential and reception facilities. According to the two paragraphs mentioned, the number of incidents of racist violence in 2020 increased to 107, compared to nearly 100 in 2019.³

Partners foundation notices that the escalating trend of incidents of racial violence and racial hate crimes in Greece continues today, as reflected in the recording of some 74 incidents of racial violence from January to December 2022, including 33 incidents targeting migrants, refugees or asylum seekers because of their national origin, religion or color.⁴ As well as 158 incidents of racial violence recorded from January to December 2023, including 89 incidents targeting migrants, refugees or asylum seekers.⁵

In specific facts supporting the above, racist violence escalated in the Evros region in August 2023 against asylum seekers and migrants after they faced accusations by far-right elements of being responsible for wildfires. In this regard, Partners foundation documented group conversations on social media apps of some far-right groups calling for the pursuit of refugees and migrants and the perpetration of massacres against them, and several videos showed these groups targeting asylum seekers and migrants, including a widely circulated video showing a person forcibly detaining 13 migrants from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia in his truck while calling for a crackdown on them.⁶

In May 2024, a video showed the mayor of the municipality of Perama, Greece, using a water cannon to spray a family of Roma. The incident occurred after a quarrel between the two parties, with the mayor accusing the family of setting up an illegal and unhealthy camp in the city and justifying his actions by claiming that it was necessary to eliminate health risks. The video showed the mayor shouting angrily and threatening the family with imprisonment if they intervened, describing their living conditions as pig conditions. His actions sparked widespread outrage in Greece, particularly on social media because of their aggressive nature, highlighting racist hate crimes against Roma

¹ Greece: National action plan against racism and intolerance 2020 – 2023, European Commission, 14 December 2021, link: <https://tinyurl.io/BXVR>

² Funding, strategy, facts and figures and contact details for national Roma contact points in Greece, European Commission, link: <https://tinyurl.com/25m4cl4g>

³ Paragraphs No. 29 and 30 of Combined twenty-third and twenty-fourth periodic reports submitted by Greece under article 9 of the Convention, due in 2019.

⁴ Racist Violence Recording Network: Presentation of the Annual Report for 2022, UNHCR, 6 Apr 2023, link: <https://tinyurl.io/BXXXK>

⁵ The Annual Report of the Racist Violence Recording Network – 2023, The Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), 23 April 2024, link: <https://tinyurl.io/BXYR>

⁶ Έβρος: Φασίστες καλούν σε πογκρόμ προσφύγων και μεταναστών μέσω viber, The Press Project, August 23, 2023, link: <https://tinyurl.io/BXaB>

communities, and persistent tensions between local authorities and Roma communities in Greece, prompting the Greek Ombudsman to announce an investigation into the incident.⁷

Also on 27 August 2024, a 23-year-old Congolese woman was subjected to a racist attack involving acts of violence, beatings and verbal expressions degrading her national origin and religion by two Greek persons while on a bus in the city of Thessaloniki, resulting in panic and anxiety among the victim, according to an official statement by the Greek police.⁸

Illegal refoulement and apartheid of refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers

Greece is obliged under articles 2 and 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to review government policies leading to the establishment or perpetuation of racial discrimination and to prevent, prohibit and eradicate practices of segregation and apartheid in territories under its jurisdiction. However, refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers in Greece continue to be subjected to forced and unlawful repatriation accompanied by violence, separation and racial segregation in reception facilities.

In this regard, Partners Foundation reviewed with concern the information contained in paragraphs "81-83" of the State party's report, which referred to the repatriation of some 41 thousand transit cases to Greece by the Greek authorities during the period from 28 February 2020 to 9 March 2020, considering that the right of refugees and asylum seekers to legal asylum in Greece and the European State poses a serious threat to the country's national security, which prompted it to suspend asylum claims.

In recent years, Greek authorities have continued their violent forced returns of refugees, which have often resulted in hundreds of refugees from Africa and the Middle East drowning in seawater. According to the latest official statistics issued in this regard, the Greek police prevented about 260,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from entering the country in 2022.⁹

More than 600 migrants and asylum seekers, mostly from Syria, Pakistan and Egypt, died on June 14, 2023, off the coast of Pylos, out of around 750 people on board a fishing boat, as a result of pushbacks by the Greek coast guard, according to testimony from several of the 104 survivors. While the Greek authorities denied the survivors' allegations and announced that investigations had been launched after domestic and international pressure, more than a year after the incident, no finding has yet been made public confirming facts about the incident.¹⁰

Also at least 43 people drowned in seawater after being forced out of Greek territorial waters by the Greek Coast Guard, or forcibly returned to the sea after reaching the Greek islands, between 2020 and 2023.¹¹

In addition, Partners Foundation reviewed with concern the information contained in paragraph 106 of the State party's report indicating that tens of thousands of asylum-seekers have been detained by the Greek authorities in private reception centers, which constitutes a pattern of apartheid or racial

⁷ The mayor doused the gypsies directly from a water cannon, Athens News, May 16, 2024, link: <https://tinyt.io/BYJ4>

⁸ Θεσσαλονίκη: Ρατσιστική επίθεση σε 23χρονη από το Κονγκό μέσα σε αστικό λεωφορείο – Δύο συλλήψεις, skai, August 27, 2024, link: <https://tinyt.io/BXjb>

⁹ Greece expanding border wall, calls for EU help on migration, Ap news, anuary 21, 2023, link: <https://tinyt.io/BXsx>

¹⁰ One year on from the tragic shipwreck off Pylos, Greece, UNHCR, 14 June 2024, link: <https://tinyt.io/BXmH>

¹¹ BBC: Καταγγελίες κατά του Λιμενικού για pushbacks και θανάτους μεταναστών, BBC, 17 June 2024, link: <https://tinyt.io/BXmy>

segregation prohibited under article 3 of the Convention. According to official statistics released in August 2024, by the end of 2023, the Greek authorities had detained an estimated 32,900 people in the Greek reception system, nearly half of them (15,914) on the islands, most of whom had been held in closed controlled centers under inhumane and extremely difficult living conditions.¹²

Discrimination in access to economic, social and cultural rights

Article 5e of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination obliges States parties to the Convention to ensure that everyone, without distinction as to race, color or national or ethnic origin, enjoys economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to work, housing, health care and an adequate standard of living.

However, despite insufficient data and underreporting of incidents of discrimination, Partners foundation noticed that individuals belonging to Roma and migrant communities in Greece suffer unfair discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to employment, health care, adequate housing and an adequate standard of living. In this regard, the latest available statistics show that 100% of Roma in Greece live under very poor living conditions and below the poverty line,¹³ and only less than 38% Roma between the ages of 20 and 24 have paid work. Also only about 24% of Roma aged 55 to 64 have paid work compared to 53% of Greece's population in this age group, indicating that Roma are systematically excluded from Greece's labor market on the grounds of ethnicity.¹⁴

Furthermore, data from the General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Greece showed that 87% of Roma live in huts and settlements in isolated areas that lack infrastructure and suffer from lack of access to drinking water, electricity, heating and toilets in their homes. Data also indicate that 3 in 5 Roma in Greece were discriminated against because of their origin when seeking housing, according to a survey conducted by the National Housing Office.¹⁵

Over the past years, individuals of immigrant origin have faced widespread discrimination in access to health-care services based on their ethnic origin. The authorities in Greece ignored the needs of migrant patients for treatment and failed on multiple occasions to provide them with adequate medical care. In specific facts supporting the above, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Greece on 5 October 2023 for failing to provide adequate medical care to a Cameroonian asylum seeker with HIV in reception centers in Moria and Polykastro. The court found that the Greek authorities had failed to take action to protect the victim's health, resulting in severe blood cancer.¹⁶

Recommendations

In the light of the above, Partners for Transparency presents the following recommendations to the Greek Government:

¹² Greece: AIDA 2023 country report, European Commission, 12 August 2024, link: <https://tinyl.io/BXuW>

¹³ International Roma Day: The Stigmatized People of Greece, GreekReporter, April 8, 2022, link: <https://tinyl.io/BYHY>

¹⁴ Roma in Greece Face a History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Racism, Unicorn Riot, April 11, 2022, link: <https://tinyl.io/BYHe>

¹⁵ "We don't like living in shacks...", UNICEF Greece, 07 April 2023, link: <https://tinyl.io/BYIJ>

¹⁶ The European Court of Human Rights Unanimously Condemns the Greek Government for Depriving an HIV-positive Asylum Seeker From Access to Antiretroviral Treatment, HIAS, Oct 9, 2023, link: <https://tinyl.io/BYIh>

- Strengthen the enforcement of laws prohibiting racial violence and racial hate crimes, while ensuring the protection of refugees, migrants, Roma and other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Immediately cease the illegal refoulement of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers and ensure that asylum claims are processed in accordance with international standards.
- Improve living conditions within reception centers and ensure refugees' and migrants' rights to humane treatment and decent living conditions.
- Promote the integration of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers into Greek society and avoid apartheid or segregation policies.
- Take immediate action to improve access to employment opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities, including Roma and persons of immigrant origin, by providing specialized training and education programmes to enable them to enter the labor market.
- Improve access to health-care services for both persons of immigrant origin and Roma, and ensure that comprehensive health services are provided without discrimination.
- Promote access to adequate housing for ethnic minorities, in particular the Roma, by launching new housing projects and better integrating them into society.