

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

2 November 2022 EUR 25/6177/2022.

GREECE HELD TO ACCOUNT FOR THE IMPACT OF AUSTERITY MEASURES ON ITS HEALTH SYSTEM

Today, Amnesty International filed a Collective Complaint with the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights, alleging that the Government of Greece violated provisions of the European Social Charter concerning the rights to health and non-discrimination because of the impact of austerity measures introduced following the economic crisis of 2009/2010.ⁱ

In 2020, Amnesty International released its report *"Resuscitation required – The Greek health system after a decade of austerity"*.ⁱⁱ The report was based on comprehensive desk-research and interviews with over 210 people – including people using the public health system, health workers, public health experts, and government representatives. The report found that the austerity measures undermined the accessibility and affordability of health care in Greece, with many people finding it harder to afford health care and access the public health system when they need to. The measures also increased the burden on health workers. Cuts in their salaries and benefits were accompanied by an increase in their workloads, due to a combination of fewer filled positions and greater demand for public health care.

The impact of these measures continued for more than a decade after many of them were introduced, including impacting the ability of the health system to respond to Covid-19. Amnesty International's interviews documented the particular and specific impact of these measures on certain marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, older persons and people who are homeless.

The report also documented how several international and regional human rights bodies have called attention to the adverse impacts of Greece's austerity measures. These include the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2012; the CEDAW Committee in 2013; the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights in 2015; the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2016; and the Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe in 2018.

In addition to the European Social Charter (revised), Greece has ratified several human rights law treaties that require the right to health be respected, protected and fulfilled. These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and provisions of its Constitution. Greece also has obligations under regional instruments that protect the right to health. Greece has also committed to delivering on the rights and principles contained in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which includes Principle 16 on health care: "Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality".

While the Greek authorities did introduce some measures to alleviate the impact of the economic crisis on people's lives, they did not do enough to protect them against the negative impact of austerity measures, including conducting human rights impact assessments both before and after the measures were introduced.

Based on the research in the report, and follow-up research conducted after the Covid-19 pandemic, and consistent with the findings of human rights bodies and civil society groups in Greece, Amnesty International's Collective Complaint alleges that Greece is in violation of Article 11(1), in conjunction with Article E of the 1996 Revised European Social Charter. It argues that austerity measures eroded the accessibility and affordability of health care in Greece, with disproportionate impact on certain marginalized individuals and groups.

Holding the government of Greece to account for its decisions during the years of the economic crisis and beyond is important to highlight that states' economic and fiscal decisions have human rights consequences and should not be immune from scrutiny and accountability.

This is even more significant currently where a series of crises – including the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine – threaten economic stability in many countries, including in Europe. It is urgent to remind governments that their human rights obligations should inform their fiscal policy decisions, and that their actions in response to economic crises should protect and not undermine people’s economic and social rights.

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International is registered to bring complaints under the European Social Charter’s collective complaints system alleging failures to implement certain provisions of the Charter. Decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights must be respected by the States concerned with national authorities being required to take measures to give them effect under domestic law.ⁱⁱⁱ

The current complaint is the second ever complaint filed by Amnesty International under the Committee’s collective complaints procedure. The first complaint was filed in March 2019 in response to the ongoing scandal of the housing situation of Roma people in Italy.^{iv}

ⁱ Collective Complaint on the Violation of the Right to Protection of Health and the Principle of Non-Discrimination, Violation of Article 11 (1) Read Alone of In Conjunction with Article E, *Amnesty International v. Greece*, 2 November 2022.

ⁱⁱ “Greece: Resuscitation required – The Greek health system after a decade of austerity”, 28 April 2020 (Index: EUR 25/2176/2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/collective-complaints-procedure1>

^{iv} “Italy: The ongoing scandal of Roma housing in Italy: Amnesty International files complaint before the European Committee of Social Rights”, Public Statement, 18 March 2019 (Index: EUR 30/0064/2019).